

**CANDIA DAMES NG News Editor [candia@nasguard.com](mailto:candia@nasguard.com)**

In 2005, United States Ambassador to The Bahamas John Rood remarked that there seemed at times to be “two Fred Mitchells” — the polite and polished public Mitchell and the more private, but more revealing Mitchell, according to one of the cables in The Nassau Guardian’s treasure trove of diplomatic documents secured through WikiLeaks.

Because of his position as foreign minister for most of the years covered by the cables, Mitchell is mentioned in the documents more than any other person.

The view of Mitchell is a mixed bag.

One U.S. diplomat wrote of Mitchell, “He is one of the government’s sharpest and most active ministers.”

The cables expose fascinating, behind the scenes insights into how country-to-country diplomacy works, and in unpolished details, how the Americans truly viewed Fred Mitchell.

Their assessment was amazingly candid.

One embassy official wrote in one of the cables: “In public, FM Mitchell studiously avoids commenting on scandals and making overly-provocative speeches.

“A pretentious and intellectual man, he prefers to remain above the fray in these situations.”

Mitchell has a desire to be seen and heard in the international arena, wrote a diplomat in another cable.

In yet another cable, a U.S. embassy official claimed businessman Franklyn Wilson had “pleaded with us” to engage constructively with The Bahamas and support Foreign Minister Mitchell’s desire to play a more prominent role on the world stage.”

A U.S. diplomat observed in a 2004 cable: “Despite a life-long career as a politician in a country where politics is personalized to the extreme, neither kissing babies nor making small talk comes naturally to Mitchell.

“He prefers to deal with agendas expeditiously and then engage in philosophical discussions or reviews of international relations drawing on his seminars at Harvard’s Kennedy School.”

It is clear from the cables — and perhaps a surprise to no one — that Fred Mitchell almost single-handedly drove the country’s foreign policy during the Christie years.

His knowledge of world issues and events, his intelligence, ambition and trademark discipline have made him well respected in both regional and international circles.

He is at home on the world stage.

Today, as opposition spokesman on foreign affairs and the public service, Mitchell shows more interest and persistence as a shadow minister than any other colleague in the Progressive Liberal Party’s parliamentary caucus.

The Americans recognized these qualities in Fred Mitchell, although they seemed deeply concerned about the foreign policy stance on a number of issues, which he drove. In some ways, the Americans viewed Mitchell as unhelpful.

“His intelligence, work ethic, and undisguised ambition have made Bahamian Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell one of the three or four most powerful members of the Perry Christie government and a person of growing influence in the Caribbean,” observed a U.S. official in 2005.

“...Fred Mitchell is a Bahamian and a black nationalist.

“The public Fred Mitchell is polished, sophisticated, and smooth and with a skilled attorney’s ability to make commitments that commit to nothing.

“Mitchell’s ‘personalistic’, close to the vest operating style frequently leaves his own ministry in the dark about his motives, policies and actions.”

The cable said the foreign minister accepted that The Bahamas is located next to the world’s superpower while constantly seeking, in small ways, to play a mini-balance of power game to try to expand The Bahamas’ foreign policy options.

The embassy official wrote that Mitchell had been particularly unhelpful on certain issues, including Haiti and a wide variety of U.N. General Assembly votes.

“Mitchell sees CARICOM as a means to an end,” the official wrote.

“The Bahamas would have little to no influence in the internal sphere if it did not band with ‘its Caribbean brothers and sisters’.

“...Minister Mitchell believes that the only time the U.S. pays attention to CARICOM countries is when Washington needs something from the region.”

A diplomat also wrote: “Mitchell has developed a persona of an aloof and humorless, but highly intellectual and respected politician.

“Oftentimes, Mitchell appears to be in agreement with officials at meetings, and then expresses opposite opinions to the media or in Cabinet. He has aspirations of being an international player and future prime minister.”

But the diplomat predicted that Mitchell’s political ascent would be hampered.

The official continued: “Mitchell is respected for his intellect, but not particularly well-liked — (not) even by the current prime minister (Christie).

“PM Christie has made snide remarks with reference to the dress and manner of the foreign minister in front of embassy personnel.

“Nevertheless, Christie trusts Mitchell, defers to him on all foreign policy matters, and often chooses him to represent The Bahamas at CARICOM heads of government meetings.”

## ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

The Americans' observation of Mitchell went past his role as foreign minister.

For instance, two days before the May 2, 2007 general election, Mitchell walked his constituency with a U.S. Embassy official at his side, a cable reveals.

Mitchell talked about local politics and the rigors of campaigning in what was shaping up to be a hot race.

According to the cable, Mitchell invited the embassy official to observe his campaign. To avoid any claim of favoritism, the diplomat also observed an unnamed FNM candidate campaign in a neighboring constituency, the cable said.

When he visited Fox Hill with Mitchell, the diplomat sat in living room after living room observing Mitchell's interaction with voters, many of whom placed their many needs before the MP, the cable said.

"As we entered each voter's formal salon, they proceeded to regale Mitchell with their problems," wrote the embassy official.

"A few wanted to talk issues, but most were eager to petition Mitchell for help as a serf may have done when granted access to his feudal lord."

The diplomat said in the cable that the voters clearly had the upper hand and knew it.

While it is unclear what Mitchell's motive was when he extended the invitation, the constituency visit provided an opportunity for that official to conduct an extensive analysis of Mitchell the politician, and the American diplomat goes into remarkable details in his writings that followed the Fox Hill visit.

The diplomat documented what he perceived to be Mitchell's frustrations on the campaign trail. He provides direct quotes attributed to the then foreign minister.

“This is Bahamian politics,” Mitchell is quoted as saying. “You want to talk about issues and they (voters) want to take whatever they can get.

“You want to help, you want to ease pain, and you must show that you care to get elected. But there is a line they want you to cross.”

The cable said a campaign worker acknowledged that the line is sometimes crossed: “People get bills paid, appliances are bought, cash changes hands. It happens, but we don’t do it.”

According to the diplomat, Mitchell openly complained that his role as minister of foreign affairs and public service put him in a particularly bad position during the campaign.

“Everyone wants a government job,” Mitchell is quoted as saying. “I wish I didn’t have the public service portfolio and I could tell them nothing could be done.”

The cable said: “Mitchell also acknowledged, however, that his public service portfolio was busiest during the campaign — taking him away from the road for hours a day as he signs for new perks and jobs.”

That cable — which was classified by then Charge d’Affaires Brent Hardt — says: “Mitchell is ill at ease with the personal interaction of grass-roots politics, but he balances this with cunning strategic planning, making his reelection uncertain and, as confirmed by his own maps, too close to call.”

The diplomat also observed: “Mitchell, not warm and sympathetic by nature, was obviously uncomfortable with deeply personal interactions with the voters. Outside their homes, however, he shined, engaging in detailed strategic discussions, planning neighborhood events and deftly directing campaign activities with staff.”

The embassy official wrote that the focus on the individual in campaigning carries over to broader Bahamian politics.

Mitchell, according to the cable, remarked to the diplomat: “Now you know why we can’t get to international agreements in Cabinet.

“We are too busy working on benches.”

He reportedly made the comment after a voter complained about the state of repair of public benches on her street.

On an earlier occasion, the Americans wrote about Mitchell's frustrations with the level of efficiency of the Christie cabinet.

According to that particular cable, at a luncheon on March 29, 2004, Mitchell was asked by a U.S. diplomat about the status of ratification of the comprehensive maritime agreement. Mitchell reportedly indicated that the matter had to go to cabinet.

"Mitchell again wistfully mused about how the Bahamian cabinet decision-making process might be improved," the cable said.

"He related that he had learned as a result of his CARICOM attendance that in other Commonwealth countries, debate and intervention on issues in the cabinet is restricted to their ministers whose portfolios are directly impacted by the issue, or ministers that assert fundamental issues of principle.

"In contrast, Mitchell intimated, the Christie cabinet of the Bahamas operates much less efficiently since any minister can intervene and express a view on any issue before the government."

At a meeting with Ambassador Rood in March 2007, Mitchell expressed his frustration at the indecision in his own government stemming from the pending elections."

"Mitchell cited the delay in signing the airport management contract and the delay in moving ahead with discussions on the Flight Information Region as two examples," the cable said.

"He noted that if the elections had been called in November and held in December, the government would either be out of power already or be finished with the elections and able to govern effectively."

A diplomat wrote in the 2007 cable that followed the Fox Hill visit: "Indeed, the Bahamian cabinet is notoriously overburdened, unable to ratify important international agreements or national policy items as it considers road paving, speed bumps (a voter favorite), stop lights and other issues important to the local population and vital for re-election."

Mitchell claimed to have the race in Fox Hill locked up, but the cable said the embassy official's glance at Mitchell's shaded maps counting support home by home told the story of a very close race.

"Mitchell's unease with personal politics cannot be helpful to him in The Bahamian system, but is likely balanced by his strategic planning and assistance of a dedicated campaign staff," the cable said.

"In such a close race — common in The Bahamas because of the small constituencies and important role of swing voters — every vote counts."

A separate cable said FNM Leader Hubert Ingraham had privately pledged to devote whatever resources it takes to defeat Mitchell.

"The fact that Mitchell now appears to be a target of his own senior staff — even staff that supports his party's re-election — adds more credibility to the view that Mitchell may not keep his foreign affairs portfolio even if he and the PLP are able to win re-election," an official wrote.

Commenting generally on the Bahamian election system, the diplomat wrote, "A well-meaning politician could easily be confused between legal attempts to assist those in need and illegal vote buying.

"A dishonest politician, of which there are more than a few in The Bahamas, has ample opportunity for corruption."

The diplomat highlighted what he suggested was the need for national anti-corruption and good governance legislation.

The embassy official also noted that with small constituencies of only about 4,000 people, candidates know voters by name, and are expected to visit with each voter personally.

"The result is a democratic system that affords everyday Bahamians incredible access to government, and gives representatives intimate knowledge of the concerns and needs of the people they represent. In one sense, it is the classic model of Athenian democracy.

"However, the system creates sometimes irresistible temptations for corruption as needy residents base their votes not on national policy or constituency leadership, but who can put the most in their pockets.

“It also focuses politicians away from larger policy issues towards local minutia, which helps explain the sometimes frustrating lack of action within the Bahamas Cabinet on issues of concern to the U.S. and often to foreign investors.”

#### DIPLOMATIC BLUNDER

As part of their extensive analysis of Mitchell the foreign minister, the Americans in a 2005 cable reveal an alleged diplomatic blunder on Mitchell’s part.

According to the cable, visiting Israeli Ambassador David Dadonn — who was stationed in Mexico City — expressed dismay to the American ambassador and another embassy official during a private meeting that he had been unable to see Bahamian Prime Minister Perry Christie during his visit to the Bahamas.

“A clearly frustrated Dadonn complained to the ambassador that his meeting with the prime minister had been repeatedly re-scheduled and then cancelled,” the cable said.

“Dadonn’s problems are similar to those encountered by former Salvadoran President Francisco Flores in scheduling his February 14-15 visit to Nassau to promote his candidacy for the OAS Secretary Generalship.

“Flores first encountered difficulty obtaining a meeting time with the prime minister. Then, while he was airborne on his way to Nassau from El Salvador, the meeting was arbitrarily moved up to start prior to his scheduled landing time. In Flores’ case, however, the meeting eventually occurred and lasted about 45 minutes.”

The focus of Ambassador Dadonn’s unease, however, was his report of his February 14 meeting with Mitchell, the cable said.

“According to Dadonn, his Monday meeting with Mitchell was tense and abrupt,” the diplomat wrote.

“A ‘curt’ FM Mitchell, related Dadonn, entered the Foreign Ministry reception room for the meeting and proceeded to equate Israeli ‘oppression’ of the Palestinian people in the Gaza with ‘white South Africans oppression of the country’s black majority’ prior to majority rule.

“Dadonn told the [U.S.] ambassador that he felt, at this point, no option except to abruptly end the meeting and walk out after only about five minutes.”

The cable continued: “Apparently realizing what he had done, Ambassador Dadonn said FM Mitchell passed a message through the ministry’s number two official, Permanent Secretary Dr. Patricia Rogers, to the Israeli Consul in the Bahamas, Ralph Seligman, that any offense that he might have conveyed was ‘unintended’ and ‘regretful’.

“Dadonn said [Rogers] scheduled a meeting for the following day — one that lasted 50 minutes — during which the permanent secretary said that the minister’s views had been ‘personal’ and ‘did not reflect (Bahamian) government policy’.”

According to the cable, Ambassador Rood made the remark of the “two Fred Mitchells” when he was asked by Dadonn for his analysis of Mitchell’s behavior.

“The [U.S.] ambassador agreed with Dadonn that the Bahamas had not been helpful to the U.S. in several [United Nations General Assembly] votes this past year, citing the Sudan and anti-Israel UNGA resolutions.

“The [U.S.] ambassador also noted that the Bahamas continued to not be as helpful on Haiti as they could be considering the massive U.S. assistance provided to the Bahamas in illegal drug and migrant interdiction.”

The cable said: “The Israeli ambassador was clearly taken aback by FM Mitchell’s comments equating Israel with racist South African policies.

“He stated that such rhetoric isn’t even heard in the Arab world anymore...Mitchell’s candid outburst to the visiting Israeli ambassador probably reflects the ‘real’ Fred Mitchell much more than his deliberately calculated, polished ‘foreign minister’ image.”

BEIJING AND HAVANA

It their scrutiny and observations of Bahamian foreign policy, the Americans viewed closely the Bahamas government's decision to establish an embassy in Beijing and to upgrade diplomatic relations with Cuba by establishing a resident Bahamian diplomatic presence in Havana.

When Mitchell sat down with a U.S. embassy official in 2003, he was asked about a recent extensive trip he had taken to China.

The official observed that Mitchell remained "closemouthed and uncommunicative".

As rumors swirled in diplomatic circles that Prime Minister Christie was planning to travel to China as well, the British High commissioner to The Bahamas called a U.S. embassy official to report "that he found it strange that the trip had still not been announced".

In the cable — which concludes with the last name of then Charge d'Affaires Robert Witajewks — an embassy official said the openings to Beijing and Havana were coming at a time of considerable budget constraints in The Bahamas.

"The government that is delaying salary increases and promotions for civil servants, and cutting back on public projects, apparently has decided that upgrading relations with Cuba and China is worth the expense," the cable said.

"Certain members of the Christie government support FM Mitchell's initiative out of either ideological sympathy, or pure balance of power reasons. Mitchell is doing this for both reasons."

The embassy official wrote that it is difficult to imagine any concrete benefits to The Bahamas from establishing a closer relationship to Cuba.

"Ideologically, FM Mitchell and others in the Bahamian cabinet will also get psychological gratification from proving that they can conduct an independent foreign policy at odds with (their) superpower neighbor."

The Americans noted that Mitchell is extremely knowledgeable about the United States, at ease in the United States, a frequent visitor to the

United States, and accepts the reality of the United States.

“But he probably doesn’t ‘love’ the United States,” the cable said.

“...Like many colleagues in the PLP, he is most comfortable with, and has the most contact with liberals.

“He seeks to differentiate the Bahamas from what he sees as a neo-conservative militaristic tilt in U.S. foreign policy.

“China, Cuba, CARICOM, even the British Commonwealth are all, in Mitchell’s eyes, vehicles that could serve to somehow increase Bahamian freedom of action otherwise constrained by the geographical reality of being located less than 50 miles from the United States.”

The diplomat wrote that Mitchell thinks of himself as a policy intellectual and strategist on par with players of larger countries in the global arena.

“In his role as foreign minister, Fred Mitchell has been criticized for his excessive travel by the Bahamian public,” an embassy official wrote.

Today, Mitchell is again seeking re-election in a constituency he won marginally in 2007. A week ago, he formally launched his campaign.

As opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, he has sought to keep a close relationship with the Americans.

Whether he would see a return as foreign minister should the PLP be re-elected, remains unclear, especially in light of the views U.S. diplomats have expressed about his “unhelpfulness” in certain foreign policy areas.

Former Prime Minister Perry Christie

ERICA WELLS

NG Managing Editor

erica@nasguard.com

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In a “frank” discussion with U.S. Ambassador John Rood in 2006, then Prime Minister Perry Christie revealed that he had taken a hands-off approach to the country’s foreign affairs policies, according to a confidential U.S. Embassy cable obtained by The Nassau Guardian through WikiLeaks.

Christie was responding to Ambassador Rood’s concerns over The Bahamas’ voting record in the United Nations and limited multilateral cooperation with the U.S. at the U.N., according to the cable.

“In response to the Ambassador’s concerns, Christie distanced himself from Minister (Fred) Mitchell’s handling of Bahamian policy, saying

‘foreign policy is driven by Fred (Mitchell) and the MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), without involvement of my office’,” the cable reads.

“Christie, who expressed surprise that The Bahamas was less in agreement with the U.S. than Barbados and Jamaica, conveyed genuine disappointment with Mitchell’s handling of these U.N. issues. He said he would consider greater involvement in foreign policy decisions and suggested that he may ask for key international human rights votes to come before Cabinet for consideration.”

The August 24 meeting was on the occasion of Christie’s birthday. During that meeting, Rood also expressed appreciation for the outstanding partnerships between The Bahamas and the United States, praising the U.S.-Bahamian bilateral relationship, according to the cable.

But Rood expressed concern that “our shared values were not always reflected in common approaches to international problems in the United Nations, where the Department’s most recent U.N. Voting

Patterns report noted that The Bahamas ranks 29th of 33 countries in the Western Hemisphere on important votes to the U.S.," the cable reads.

In a separate cable, a U.S. diplomat noted, "Prime Minister Christie has not been engaged on U.N. and international issues. Sometimes criticized for failing to attend international events, Christie is content to allow Foreign Minister Mitchell to oversee Bahamian foreign policy.

"Mitchell's relationship with PM Christie remains strong, though he is not in Christie's inner circle and there is no personal bond between them. Christie appears to trust Mitchell's formulation and handling of foreign policy. Though Christie has been privately critical of Mitchell on occasion, Mitchell has significant ability to influence The Bahamas's stance on U.N. and other foreign policy matters."

Ambassador Rood reminded Christie of his government's past advocacy against apartheid and encouraged Christie to use The Bahamas' U.N. vote to stand up for its own values and democratic principles elsewhere in the world, according to the August cable.

"The Ambassador suggested that the declining U.N. compatibility figures highlighted a need for closer dialogue on these issues between The Bahamas and the United States," the cable said.

The cable noted that Mitchell subsequently told the Ambassador that Christie had requested an analysis of The Bahamas' recent U.N. votes.

#### Concern over Bahamas Uncensored website

In that same meeting, Ambassador Rood also expressed to Christie his concern about what he described as the anti-U.S. viewpoints conveyed in the "Bahamas Uncensored website formerly administered by Fred Mitchell and which is seen by the Bahamian public and media as still largely under his editorial control", according to the cable.

Christie told the Ambassador that he doubted Mitchell was still directly involved in the site, but acknowledged that the perception of his continued involvement could contribute to perceptions of problems in the bilateral relationship, the cable reads.

In a "Note" the cable added: "The website (bahamasuncensored.com) is written in Mitchell's rhetorical style with MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) inside information and knowledge that no journalist would have access to."

In another cable, a U.S. diplomat writes: "The private Fred Mitchell is on display in a website previously titled 'Fred Mitchell Uncensored' and now nominally edited by a third-party and named 'Bahamas Uncensored'. In the Bahamian political circles, it is assumed that the foreign minister retains editorial control over the website. Mitchell hides behind the website and makes more petulant and more candid commentary than he normally would in public."

Mitchell has repeatedly stated that he is no longer associated with the website.

Four days after Ambassador Rood met with Christie, Mitchell also met with the Ambassador to express his concern about an Op-Ed released by Rood that called for closer cooperation between the U.S. and The Bahamas in the U.N. that appeared in The Nassau Guardian earlier that month, a U.S. diplomat wrote in a separate cable.

In the wake of the op-ed local media and opposition figures criticized Mitchell's handling of the country's foreign policy, and he requested a meeting with the Ambassador to discuss his concerns about the op-ed and the perceptions it had generated, according to the cable.

"Mitchell, who is sensitive to media criticism, is facing a difficult fight in his coming reelection bid. He said that he felt that the op-ed contradicted recent public statements by the Ambassador about the closeness of the bilateral relationship. He said the press had sought to spin the op-ed as a sign of U.S. support for the Free National Movement," the U.S. diplomat wrote.

"The Ambassador made it clear the U.S. had no intention to pick sides in the election. Both parties were friends. He challenged Mitchell's perception of the op-ed, suggesting he was reacting to the media's spin rather than the substance of the piece itself. The op-ed had detailed a broad range of partnerships

between our countries, had maintained a positive, constructive tone, and concluded that the relationship was 'second to none'."

The Ambassador, according to the cable, explained to Mitchell that promoting human rights was a vital element of U.S. policy and one he took seriously. He pointed out that the U.S. and The Bahamas shared the same values, but the U.N. voting record does not reflect that compatibility.

Mitchell insisted that it was the policy of The Bahamas to "stay out" and "abstain on matters of controversy", and his goal was to maintain a "low profile" in such matters.

"The Permanent Secretary noted that The Bahamas often 'abstains with a reason'. When pressed to defend specific votes, Mitchell acknowledged that he generally did not know the specific wording of the resolutions in question, according to the cable.

In a direct contradiction to what Christie told the Ambassador days earlier, according to the cable, Mitchell "somewhat disingenuously insisted that his role in shaping the government's response on these matters was limited — that he merely 'took advice' from his ministry and conveyed the decision of the Cabinet".

"He claimed that he had inherited a policy to abstain on voting on country specific resolutions," according to the cable.

In the 'Comment' section at the end of the cable, the U.S. diplomat wrote: "Mitchell has been taking a beating in the local media in the past few months for his handling of the U.S. relationship and perceived closeness to Cuba, highlighted by the mid-July opening of a new Embassy in Havana.

"Although no election date has been set and they could be held as far off as May 2007, the parties are on election footing and will seek to use any perception of difference for political advantage."

The Ambassador reassured Mitchell that he was sensitive to election politics, but made it clear that while the relationship is 'second-to-none', the Embassy would continue to speak up on issues of concern, reads the cable.

“Mitchell’s statement that The Bahamas abstains from the country specific resolutions in the United Nations flies in the face of their voting record,” said the cable.

End