

Following exposure of military massacre in Iraq

The New York Times fingers whistleblower WikiLeaks

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The release of video footage Monday showing cold-blooded murder committed by US military forces on the streets of eastern Baghdad in July 2007 has evoked widespread outrage and horror. The video has been viewed more than 4 million times since its posting, offering a worldwide audience a first-hand glimpse of the real character of the US occupation of Iraq.

It has also provoked the liberal newspaper of record in the US, the *New York Times*, to zero in on WikiLeaks, the web site that exposed the crime, as a dangerous source of opposition that should, if things worked out to the *Times*' liking, be put out of business.

The chilling July 2007 video, made available to and posted on WikiLeaks, records an attack by US helicopter gunships on a crowd of a dozen or so men, including, as it would become known, two Reuters news agency employees, Namir Noor-Eldeen and his assistant Saeed Chmagh. The two Iraqi journalists were among 10 to 15 Iraqis killed in the massacre, which is no doubt typical of innumerable such incidents. (See "Leaked video shows US military killing of two Iraqi journalists")

The video footage posted by WikiLeaks reveals that—without making any attempt to determine the identities of the individuals—the helicopter gunners receive permission to kill everyone in the group and set about their murderous work with enthusiasm. When a local man stops to aid the wounded, his van is fired on, wounding two children. The helicopter pilots gloat about the carnage.

One or two of the Iraqis in the group appear to be carrying weapons. Civilians are permitted to own firearms in Iraq, and many do. Neither the gunship nor any other US forces are in danger at any point.

According to reporters present nearby, the American forces were firing on everything that moved that day. This is the nature of a colonial war. The occupiers, confronted with a hostile population, come to view everyone as the enemy. In the present conflict, the extraordinary firepower available to US forces increases the likelihood of fatalities. As many as one million Iraqis have died as the result of the illegal US-led

invasion launched in March 2003. The video in question makes the immense death toll somewhat easier to comprehend.

The Pentagon attempted to prevent Reuters from obtaining the video of the 2007 murders and covered them up. All the troops involved in the killings were exonerated, and the army declared that the incident was conducted according to its rules of engagement. Various experts have demonstrated that this is false, even on the military's own terms.

The *New Yorker* posted a piece April 5 by Raffi Khatchadourian which points out that the operation contravened the army's rules of engagement on at least four grounds: proportionality; positive identification of the targets as combatants; "command culture" (the helicopter crew falsified the situation on the ground, exaggerating or inventing threats, and their commander accepted their claims without question); and the firing on the wounded.

All this may be very well, but the *New York Times* has other concerns. Its article is headlined, rather ominously, "Iraq Video Brings Notice to a Web Site." It might be entitled, "*New York Times* Fingers a Web Site."

The piece begins by identifying WikiLeaks as a web site "that posts classified and sensitive documents." It notes that "Somehow—it will not say how—WikiLeaks found the necessary computer time to decrypt" the video in question. All in all, the article suggests, this was clearly a dubious or illegitimate undertaking.

The *Times* reporters note that "the site has become a thorn in the side of authorities in the United States and abroad. With the Iraq attack video, the clearinghouse for sensitive documents is edging closer toward a form of investigative journalism and to advocacy." As opposed to the *Times*, of course, which practices nothing but objective journalism.

The *Times* is particularly concerned about other potential exposures of the crimes of the US military, writing, "WikiLeaks claimed to have another encrypted video, said to show an American airstrike in Afghanistan that killed 97 civilians last year, and used the opportunity to ask for donations."

The article refers several times to the regrettable fact that

WikiLeaks is difficult to shut down. It notes, for example, “Where judges and plaintiffs could once stop or delay publication with a court order, WikiLeaks exists in a digital sphere in which information becomes instantly available.” The *Times* adds: “By being everywhere, yet in no exact place, WikiLeaks is, in effect, beyond the reach of any institution or government that hopes to silence it.”

Once more: “WikiLeaks has grown increasingly controversial as it has published more material. (The United States Army called it a threat to its operations in a report last month.) Many have tried to silence the site; in Britain, WikiLeaks has been used a number of times to evade injunctions on publication by courts that ruled that the material would violate the privacy of the people involved. The courts reversed themselves when they discovered how ineffectual their rulings were.”

The *Times* mentions the Pentagon’s claim without a comment. In 2008 a US army counterintelligence officer wrote a report alleging that WikiLeaks represented a “potential ... threat to the US Army.” The report recommended efforts to “damage or destroy” the web site.

The WikiLeaks site alleges that its staff has been targeted for surveillance and harassment by the US State Department and possibly the CIA. In a blog post, the group’s co-founder, Julian Assange, asserts that the US government activity “includes attempted covert following, photographing, filming and the overt detention & questioning of a WikiLeaks’ volunteer in Iceland.” There is no reason to doubt these claims.

The *Times*, however, like much of the US media, identifies the main threat, not in the murderous actions of the American military or the repressive operations of the US intelligence apparatus, but in the efforts by honest journalists to expose the crimes of imperialism.

The *Christian Science Monitor*, in that same spirit, headlines one of its articles, “Video of Iraqi journalists’ killings: Is WikiLeaks a security threat?” The article begins: “The US military has been warily watching for several years the group that released on Monday a graphic video showing a US helicopter apparently killing two Iraqi journalists from Reuters in a Baghdad suburb in 2007.”

Significantly, neither the *Times* nor the *Christian Science Monitor* questions the authenticity of the video, or seriously disputes that it exposes an atrocity. Rather, they tacitly acknowledge, along with the military, that the revelation of the truth about the Iraq war represents a risk.

The liberal media in the US and liberal circles, more generally, have accommodated themselves in recent years to the crimes of American imperialism. A massive campaign of lies by the White House, an illegal invasion of a foreign country, brutal treatment of prisoners of war, CIA and military torture sites—all of this has been accepted with barely a protest.

Incidents that would have drawn outraged comments from the *Times* and other publications as recently as the Vietnam War era, along with demands for Congressional investigations and

the laying of criminal charges, are met with a shrug of the shoulder, if not an approving wink. One might say that elements in the liberal establishment have acquired a taste for such operations. In any event, they now identify fully with the US military and the CIA, and recognize those as among the chief defenders of their wealth and privileges.

The *Times*’ targeting of WikiLeaks also expresses a persistent theme in the establishment media about the danger represented by the Internet and alternative news outlets.

Times executive editor Bill Keller, in an October 2006 speech in Ann Arbor, Michigan, warned about the weakening of the “establishment press” in the face of growing competition from new sources of news and opinion on the Internet. (See “New York Times editor touts role of establishment press in ‘war on terror’”)

He might have been predicting his paper’s present anxiety about the WikiLeaks revelations, when he noted that “Legions of Internet journalists include at least a few who would feel no compunction about disclosing life-threatening information.” Keller noted with approval that “we have not yet fallen into information anarchy” and praised news outlets such as his own “that still take their responsibilities seriously,” i.e., that control and vet the flow of information to the public.

Along similar lines, in an interview several years before his retirement in 2004, former NBC news anchorman Tom Brokaw asserted that cyberspace should be managed for younger audiences, in particular. (See “Exit NBC anchor Tom Brokaw: a nonentity in the service of wealth and power”)

“We can’t let that generation and a whole segment of the population just slide away out to the Internet and retrieve what information it wants without being in on it,” Brokaw declared. “I also believe strongly that the Internet works best when there are gatekeepers. When there are people making determinations and judgments about what information is relevant and factual and useful. Otherwise, it’s like going to the rainforest and just seeing a green maze.”

The entire US establishment is currently considering the means by which it might suppress oppositional voices on the Internet, which do indeed represent a “threat” to the present social order.

The WikiLeaks video can be viewed below:



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