

A record of war crimes

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The tens of thousands of documents posted online by WikiLeaks Sunday have provided a detailed and searing indictment of a criminal colonial war that the Obama administration has made its own.

In its sheer volume—92,000 documents, 200,000 pages—the so-called Afghan War Diary makes an incontrovertible case that for nearly nine years the US military has conducted a campaign of terror and deadly violence against the Afghan people.

Consisting of battlefield reports written by US soldiers and officers, the documents record the deaths of civilians resulting from air strikes on their homes and the killing of Afghans on motorcycles and in cars and buses by trigger-happy troops manning roadblocks.

They lift the veil on the operations of Task Force 373, a secret “black” unit comprised of special operations troops charged with hunting down and killing alleged leaders of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The unit worked off a list of at least 2,000 individuals who were sentenced to death by the Pentagon and the CIA without being charged, much less tried, for any offense. In the course of kicking down doors and calling in air strikes against those it targeted, the unit has managed to kill numerous innocent men, women and children.

Also exposed is the growing use of Reaper and Predator drones, unmanned aircraft that attack their victims from 50,000 feet, wreaking death and destruction on defenseless civilians without warning.

The documents likewise expose the systematic cover-up of atrocities committed by the US military. In a number of cases, civilian casualties listed in the reports were never made public. In others, the reports list civilians killed by US fire as insurgents.

This murderous character of the war, and the systematic lying by the military command, were brought home forcefully the day after the WikiLeaks release with the report of one of the worst massacres in nine years of war. The government of President Hamid

Karzai publicly condemned a US-NATO rocket attack on civilians in Helmand Province last Friday in which as many as 52 people were killed, including entire families, most of them women and children. While various news agencies managed to photograph the corpses and speak to residents of the area who had buried their families or driven the wounded to a local hospital, a spokesman for the US-led occupation forces said that there was “no evidence of civilian casualties.”

Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, told a press conference in London Monday that “thousands” of similar incidents revealed in the documents constituted war crimes that should be investigated and prosecuted.

Just as importantly, the documents expose the real view of the military on the ground toward the Karzai puppet regime which they are propping up. They reveal instances of grotesque corruption and sadistic violence by a collection of warlords, drug dealers and killers who constitute the pillars of the Afghan state and are hated by the Afghan people.

The Obama White House has responded to the leak by vowing to continue the Afghanistan war and issuing threatening statements about how the exposure of classified material placed the lives of troops at risk and endangered “national security.”

Keeping this material secret was designed not to protect American soldiers, but rather to conceal the reality of the carnage in Afghanistan from the American people, who are growing increasingly hostile towards this, America’s longest war.

Comparisons are being made widely between the WikiLeaks revelations and the Pentagon Papers, which nearly 40 years ago exposed the lies underlying the American intervention in Vietnam and the criminality of the US war there.

The differences, however, are perhaps even more striking. At that time, when Daniel Ellsberg leaked

confidential documents, members of the US Senate were prepared to defy the government and place them into the record, while the *New York Times* aggressively pursued the story, fighting court injunctions to publish the material.

Today, there is no significant figure in the Senate or the Democratic Party prepared to do anything similar. As for the media, there is little or no expression of revulsion or shock over the documents' revelations of staggering levels of US violence against the Afghan population. The central focus of most coverage has been the legality of leaking these reports, not their chilling content.

For its part, the *Times* published its story only after urging WikiLeaks to engage in self-censorship and clearing it with the White House. The newspaper's main conclusion is that the leaked documents demonstrate the need to intensify the war in Afghanistan and spread it more aggressively into Pakistan. It has sought to spin the documents as evidence of a "hamstrung war" in which the US military has been subjected to too many restrictions while denied sufficient resources. The *Times* advances this line in the face of evidence detailing a staggering degree of brutality in Afghanistan.

That it was left to WikiLeaks, an online organization with a tiny fraction of the *Times*' resources, to make these revelations is an indictment of the media as a whole. The *Times* and other news organizations, with their "embedded" reporters, are no doubt aware of many of the incidents revealed in the leaked documents, but chose not to report them. They, no less than the Pentagon and the political establishment, have conducted a systematic cover-up of the crimes against the Afghan people.

Obama's escalation of the war in Afghanistan—with American troop levels within the next two weeks reaching 100,000 (together with 50,000 NATO and other foreign forces)—has also been facilitated by the prostration of the "antiwar" protest movement, which for all intents and purposes closed up shop in the wake of the November 2008 election.

After working for years to divert popular hostility to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan into the safe channel of support for the Democratic Party, the liberal and ex-radical groups that comprised the protest outfits have embraced Obama's "progressive" agenda, largely

accepting the official line that Afghanistan is a "good war." There is no reason to expect that the massive body of evidence to the contrary disclosed this week will shift that position.

Despite the continuing mass opposition to the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, revealed in poll after poll, there is no doubt a degree of discouragement over the inability to shift US policy. Millions went to the polls to vote against war in 2008, only to get an Obama administration that has escalated the reign of terror against the Afghan people, while continuing the Iraqi occupation.

What is required is the organization of a genuine popular antiwar movement. Real opposition to war can be developed only as part of the independent political mobilization of the working class against the profit system—the source of militarism—and both the Democratic and Republican parties, which defend and promote it. This movement must advance the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American and other foreign occupation troops from Afghanistan and Iraq. It must also demand that all those responsible for these wars of aggression—in both the Bush and Obama administrations—be held accountable.

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