Pentagon retaliates against WikiLeaks, Pvt. Manning

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In response to the WikiLeaks posting of tens of thousands of secret documents on the Afghanistan war, the Pentagon has launched a manhunt within the military and called in the FBI for possible prosecution of the actual whistleblower who supplied the evidence of US atrocities.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, used a Pentagon press conference Thursday to vilify WikiLeaks and its editor, Julian Assange, while vowing to crack down on anyone involved in making public the documents comprising the so-called Afghan War Diary posted by the organization.

WikiLeaks has obtained some 92,000 secret documents on the Afghanistan war, while claiming it does not know the original source of the classified material. It has posted 76,000 of the documents online, most of them battlefield reports from units in Afghanistan. They have cast a new light on the savage war that has been waged against the Afghan people under Bush and Obama, as well as the duplicity of both administrations in their justification of the war to the American people.

The group has held back another 15,000 documents, consisting largely of intelligence reports, saying it wants to review them for information that could potentially place individuals in Afghanistan at risk.

The thrust of the statements made by Gates and Mullen, which dovetail with a sinister campaign in the corporate media, is that WikiLeaks and Assange in particular have already placed lives at risk by revealing military methods, as well as the identity of some Afghan informers and turncoats who collaborated with the US-led occupation.

The WikiLeaks editor "can say whatever he likes about the greater good he and his source are doing, but the truth is they might already have on their hands the blood of some young soldier or that of an Afghan family." Mullen told Pentagon reporters.

Gates said that the "battlefield consequences" of the leak are "potentially severe and dangerous for our troops."

While some reporters asked whether there was any evidence that the leaked documents had resulted in deaths, no one at the press conference pointed to the absurdity and hypocrisy of the angry denunciations by Gates and Mullen.

Two men intimately involved in prosecuting a colonial war against the Afghan people that has caused the deaths of tens of thousands are charging others with having "blood on their hands," because they dared to make public documents exposing crimes committed in this war.

According to some analyses, the documents released thus far catalogue the deaths of over 20,000 Afghans during the US-led war and occupation between 2004 and 2009. This is undoubtedly only a fraction of the actual total, as many known mass killings are not included in the material. This blood—real and not hypothetical—is on the hands of Obama, Bush, Gates, Mullen and their collaborators.

The sensationalized charges from Washington were contradicted by a top US military officer in Afghanistan. Maj. Gen. John Campbell, the US commander in eastern Afghanistan, told reporters Wednesday that the release of the documents had no "great impact on us." He added, "We have not changed any of our operations or any strategy here based on that leak."

In his remarks, Gates also made it clear that he had called upon the Justice Department and the FBI to assist in the Defense Department's investigation of the leak for the purpose of potentially indicting Assange and others at WikiLeaks as well as any other civilians who may have aided in making the material available.

"The investigation should go where it needs to go," Gates said. Questioned about whether this meant WikiLeaks was a target, he added that he didn't "know if the investigation should stop" at the Defense Department and "having the FBI as a partner" would leave "open the full scope of investigation."

Thus far, the military has reportedly focused its investigation on Private First Class Bradley Manning, a 22-year-old intelligence specialist who was charged earlier this month with providing WikiLeaks with a classified video that was posted online under the title "Collateral Murder." The video, taken from the gun-sight camera of a US Apache helicopter, depicts the July 2007 massacre of over a dozen civilians in Baghdad, including two Reuters journalists. The film, which includes the chatter of the helicopter crew reveling in the killing, also shows an attack on a family that tried to aid the wounded, killing more unarmed civilians and wounding two young children.

An unnamed Pentagon official told the *Wall Street*

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Journal that an examination of the computer used by Manning showed that he had downloaded the Afghanistan logs, even though he was deployed at the time with the 10th Mountain Division in Iraq. Manning is also charged with illegally downloading some 200,000 State Department documents from the military's secret Internet network.

Manning was turned in by an informer, Adrian Lamo, a former computer hacker whom the soldier had contacted and reportedly told via online chats that he had leaked the helicopter video and was prepared to do the same with other material.

Since his arrest, Manning has been held by the US military in Kuwait, awaiting an Article 32 hearing, essentially the military's equivalent of a grand jury hearing. The imprisonment of the private overseas appears designed to prevent him from obtaining effective legal support as well as denying him contact with his family and the media. As Julian Assange has repeatedly charged, it has much the same purpose as the holding of supposed "enemy combatants" at the Guantanamo prison in Cuba.

The growing campaign against WikiLeaks picked up significant backing Wednesday when Senator Lindsey Graham, a ranking Republican member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, called for the government to bring criminal charges against the Internet-based group.

"I'm willing to prosecute anybody who led to undermining the war effort," Graham said on Fox News. "As far as I know, there's no immunity for a web site to be able to pass on documents… We need to go after anyone involved in the leak of classified documents."

Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona, meanwhile, called for life imprisonment for whoever was responsible for the leak.

Jane Harman, the Democratic congresswoman who chairs the House homeland security panel's subcommittee on intelligence, also accused WikiLeaks of having given "the Taliban its new 'enemies list.'"

The media, which has treated the leaked document with a combination of hostility and indifference from the outset, has largely rounded on Assange and WikiLeaks, taking up the charge that some of the documents revealed the identities of Afghan informers and could thereby expose them to danger.

The *Times* of London published a story Wednesday claiming that some of the leaked documents included the names and villages of Afghans who had provided intelligence to US occupation forces.

Assange, in an interview with the paper, pushed back against the charge that he had placed "innocent lives" at risk, pointing out that in many cases these informants were "acting in a criminal way," frequently providing false information to US forces with the aim of "creating victims themselves."

The WikiLeaks editor pointed out that the inclusion of the names and locations of confidential informants in documents available to virtually anyone in uniform, not to mention large numbers of civilian contractors, was the Pentagon's policy, not his. He also said that the group had asked the Obama administration to help "to minimize the chances of innocent informers being named," but that it received no response.

Much of the media has picked up this theme, attempting to portray Assange and WikiLeaks as responsible for endangering innocent lives in Afghanistan, in order to obscure the content of the leaked documents themselves, which detail the annihilation of tens of thousands of such lives as a result of the US war.

This found a particularly crude expression in an interview Assange gave Wednesday to NBC's Today show, in which host Meredith Vieira asked the WikiLeaks editor, "if somebody is executed because now their name is out there, would you consider that your form of collateral damage?"

This attempt to draw an equals sign between the possibility that an Afghan quisling whose name appears in a leaked document will face retribution and the daily killing of civilians in aerial bombings, special forces assassination raids, drone attacks and checkpoint shootings is nothing short of obscene.

The only "crime" for which either Manning or WikiLeaks and Assange are guilty is that of breaking the media's self-censorship of information exposing the bloody and criminal character of the US war in Afghanistan and presenting massive and incontrovertible evidence of war crimes to the American and world public.

There is no doubt that for this offense, the Obama administration and the US military and intelligence apparatus will seek vengeance. It will attempt to make an example of a young American soldier who apparently turned against Washington's wars and, if possible, criminalize the activities of WikiLeaks.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls upon working people to oppose the persecution of Private Manning and the campaign against WikiLeaks, which represent a fundamental attack on democratic rights and the right of the American people to information on the military atrocities being carried out in their name. Those who should face prosecution are the top officials in both the Bush and Obama administration who are responsible for launching and continuing criminal wars of aggression.

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