

The European press and the WikiLeaks revelations

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Two and a half weeks after the publication of 92,000 documents by the WikiLeaks web site, a cloak of silence has been thrown by the European press over the details the documents reveal about the brutal NATO occupation of Afghanistan.

The German magazine *Der Spiegel* (given privileged access to the WikiLeaks documents along with the British *Guardian* and the *New York Times*) prominently featured the classified files, exposing in particular the collaboration of German elite forces with US military death squads targeting alleged insurgents for murder.

In its latest edition, however, *Der Spiegel* has largely dropped the issue, referring to WikiLeaks only once in a two-paragraph article dealing with US efforts to improve its relations with Pakistan.

Der Spiegel's virtual silence is undoubtedly bound up with an offensive launched by the German government to challenge the WikiLeaks material. Last week, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle went on record to condone German army collaboration in targeted killings, claiming that such assassinations are legally sanctioned.

The downplaying of the WikiLeaks documents is reflected in other major news outlets in Germany and across Europe. The dropping of coverage follows a series of articles in both right-wing and liberal newspapers which, echoing the American press, played down the significance of the documents, claiming they provided little in the way of new information. At the same time, the articles attacked the credentials of WikiLeaks editor and founder Julian Assange.

Now European politicians from across the political spectrum are citing media criticisms of WikiLeaks and taking advantage of the general suppression of its exposures of US-NATO atrocities to reinforce their commitment to the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan,

albeit with the proviso that European governments have more say in the conduct of military operations.

A document previously leaked by WikiLeaks, which has received virtually no coverage in the European press, is a CIA report entitled "Why Counting on Apathy Might Not Be Enough." The report was drafted with the specific aim of "shoring up Afghan war support in Western Europe."

The document, dated March 11 of this year, acknowledges that large majorities in France and Germany (80 percent) oppose any escalation of the war. It warns that "if some forecasts of a bloody summer in Afghanistan come to pass, passive French and German dislike of their troop presence could turn into active and politically potent hostility."

Noting that a major factor in the toppling of the Dutch government earlier this year was its repudiation of a promise to withdraw Dutch troops from Afghanistan, the CIA report intimates that other European governments, in particular the French and German, could face a similar threat and be "unwilling to pay a political price for increasing troop levels or extending deployments."

As an antidote, the report recommends a "communication offensive." In the case of France, the CIA advises that stress be placed on "the Taliban rolling back hard-won progress on girls' education." To counteract "German pessimism" about the NATO mission, the report suggests that "messages that illustrate how a defeat in Afghanistan could heighten Germany's exposure to terrorism, opium and refugees might make the war more salient to skeptics."

In the aftermath of the WikiLeaks revelations, sections of the European press have initiated precisely with such a "communication offensive." Writing in *Die Welt* on July 29, chief political correspondent Ansgar

Graw acknowledged the “pessimistic tenor” of the WikiLeaks documents. But, he argued, any withdrawal of military forces would serve only “to increase the determination of extremists and terrorists to fight.”

A troop withdrawal would “be a blow not only to the president and the US, but to the West as a whole,” Graw wrote. Instead, what is needed, he continued, is “one final show of force by all NATO and ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] states” based on “expanding their military and financial involvement up to 2015 and beyond.”

Graw further argued for a new strategy aimed at establishing new centres of power in the provinces based on concessions to local Taliban leaders. This strategy, increasingly favoured by the governments in Paris and Berlin, would diminish the authority of the US military command over European forces.

After nearly nine years of bloodshed and the deaths of tens of thousands of Afghans, it is clear that the “final show of force” advocated by Graw, together with the “targeted killings” defended by the German foreign minister, means an enormous intensification of the death and destruction in Afghanistan.

In France, the “newspaper of record” *Le Monde* led Tuesday with an article highlighting criticisms of the WikiLeaks documents by a number of human rights groups, including Amnesty International. Echoing the line of the Pentagon, these groups argue that the WikiLeaks material puts at risk Afghan informants and collaborators with the occupation forces.

The only significant voice opposing the French deployment is former defence minister Paul Quilès, who declared in *Le Monde* that the public could now tell that the NATO operation in Afghanistan was not a “war on terror.” Citing former president Charles de Gaulle, Quilès stressed the need for an independent French foreign policy.

In its own editorials, *Le Monde* argues there is no alternative to the NATO operation in Afghanistan, while urging parliamentary deputies to make a better case for the war.

Those behind the WikiLeaks web site no doubt hoped that the exposure of US-NATO war crimes in Afghanistan would spark an honest and open public debate and strengthen those forces arguing for an end to the war and the US-NATO occupation.

In the event, the lack of any genuine democratic

opposition to imperialist war crimes in the establishment press on both sides of the Atlantic has created conditions where the most ferocious advocates of the Afpak war can mount their own offensive for a further escalation, while conducting a campaign to close down the WikiLeaks web site.

The refusal of any section of the establishment press to defend WikiLeaks is mirrored by a myriad of ex-radical organizations, which have played down the exposure of US-NATO atrocities and refuse to mount a principled opposition to the war in Afghanistan.

In the past two weeks, both the web sites of the French New Anti-Capitalist Party and the German Left Party have failed to run any articles on the WikiLeaks revelations or statements defending the web site against state repression.

There is broad and growing popular anti-war sentiment in the US and Europe, but it can find expression only on the basis of the independent mobilization of the working class against militarism and war, based on a socialist and internationalist program for the overthrow of the source of imperialist war—the capitalist profit system.

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