

German media attack WikiLeaks

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6 August 2010

The 92,000 secret documents published on WikiLeaks have dealt a blow to the German government's propaganda campaign about the war in Afghanistan. They have exposed as lies the claims that what is taking place in Afghanistan is the development of democratic structures, the building of schools and drilling of wells, and so forth. The documents have revealed the brutality of the war being conducted against the Afghan people, and the role played by the *Bundeswehr* (German Armed Forces).

The documents that WikiLeaks provided in advance to *Der Spiegel*, the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* for evaluation describe how at roadblocks, for example, occupying soldiers kill Afghans on motorcycles, in cars and busses. The documents show that countless civilians are falling victim to attacks by unmanned drones, something that is hardly ever reported. Furthermore, it is clear from the documents that special commando units (death squads) carry out targeted killings in the context of a policy of "capture-kill", working through lists of "suspects" that run into four figures.

The *Bundeswehr* too is deeply involved in these terrorist commando units. For example, 300 soldiers from Task Force 373 are stationed at the German camp Marmal in Mazar-i-Sharif, from where they launch their deadly missions. They cooperate closely with the German forces, who help to create the lists of those to be hunted down.

In response to the documents, Christian Dienst, a spokesman of the Defence Ministry, has agreed that suspects may have been killed by German soldiers. But targeted killing was "in accordance with international law", he claimed.

Although the documents expose the true face of the dirty colonial war in Afghanistan, and certain reports in *Der Spiegel* and in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* have reported the facts, there has hardly been any critical analysis in the German media regarding the contents of the documents. Instead, editorial writers have tried to downplay their importance, while attacking WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange. After a few days, the issue disappeared almost completely from the media.

In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Stefan Kornelius, a supporter

of the Afghanistan war, claimed in an editorial that the documents did not contain "many sensations". They merely underscored "what was already known". It would therefore be wrong "to compare the Afghanistan papers with the Pentagon Papers". This refers to the documents published in 1971 in the *New York Times* that provided evidence that the US government was systematically lying about the true scope of its military commitment and political objectives in the Vietnam war.

But this is exactly what applies in the case of the WikiLeaks revelations, both in regard to the US and German governments. Today, however, neither the *Times* nor the *Süddeutsche* is prepared to challenge its own government. In the same editorial, Kornelius repeats the propaganda lie that the more than 40 nations involved in the war in Afghanistan are "guided by a sincere desire to bring peace and the development of Afghanistan".

The documents, which prove the opposite, are regarded by Kornelius as a threat to the war effort. They have the "potential to destroy the last hope for a military and political success in Afghanistan", he writes. Just like the Internet as a whole, they could "become a dangerous factor for belligerent nations, since secret information is critical for success and failure in a conflict".

This is a barely disguised call for censorship. The once liberal *Süddeutsche* now stands so uncritically behind the Afghanistan war that it subordinates its reporting of the war aims to the line of the German government. Those like WikiLeaks founder Assange, who do not follow these rules and follow instead their real calling as journalists, are sharply attacked.

In a further comment, the *Süddeutsche* spreads the slander that the publication of the documents was "part of a PR strategy", which is "aimed at raising the profile of WikiLeaks and securing donations to finance the website". The paper then quotes Steven Aftergood, a member of the Federation of American Scientists, who has accused WikiLeaks of "information vandalism" and has declared the website to be an "enemy of open society". The *Süddeutsche* thought this evaluation was "too harsh", yet it takes a similar position.

Conservative German papers too have reacted angrily to the publication of the documents by WikiLeaks. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) said that by publishing the documents the website gave the Taliban information about NATO tactics and procedures. Directly contradicting this, the paper also claimed the documents contained nothing new and were being exploited by government opponents. “Everything is already known” and, moreover, “is presented in confusing detail”.

FAZ noted approvingly that in contrast to its previous exposures, WikiLeaks was now working with *Der Spiegel*, the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, who would not simply “publish and be damned”.

Die Welt, published by Springer-Verlag, speculated on the extent to which the documents provided “a false image”, by selecting “only news that paints a negative picture”. Should this be the case, the Pentagon would need to “immediately complete the picture and present the ‘other side’”. The Ministry of Defence knew how to “place” agreeable information in the media.

Like the media, so too the various parliamentary parties have also condemned the publication of the documents. The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Ruprecht Polenz (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), spoke of a “scandal with potentially far-reaching consequences”. The publication of the documents could affect the safety of German troops on the ground, because the Taliban could draw conclusions about the future actions of the allies from the description of past operations, and could make adjustments, said Polenz in *Tagesspiegel*.

The defence spokeswoman for the Free Democratic Party (FDP), Elke Hoff, expressed her concern that the information was being published in the midst of “this particularly difficult situation in Afghanistan”. She accused WikiLeaks of having published the documents “without regard to the soldiers in the field”.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD), which initiated the war effort in 2001 together with the Greens, put it even more bluntly. Their defence policy spokesman Rainer Arnold said in *Die Welt*, publication of the documents was grist to the mill of those “who always knew this mission was wrong. They now have some additional arguments”. In *Tagesspiegel*, he argued that the publication “would not make future operations easier”, which is why he was “anything but happy” about what had happened.

In *Spiegel Online*, the defence expert of the Greens, Omid Nouripour, merely commented that it was disturbing “how little the federal government has informed parliament about the activities of American special forces in the area controlled by Germany”.

Similar criticism was expressed by the foreign policy

spokesman of the Left Party, Wolfgang Gehrcke. He said the parliamentary mandate for Afghanistan had been agreed “on the basis of false, or at least inadequate information” and speculated that the government had either been misinformed or had been party to the US policy of deception.

In reality, the Left Party supports the deceptions of the US and the German government. While the majority of the population oppose the war and abhor the policy of targeted killings, the Left Party, despite its occasional pacifist statements, is deeply implicated.

According to information from *Spiegel Online*, as early as June 18, the government informed leading representatives of all the parliamentary factions sitting on the Defence Committee about the operations of US special forces in the German sphere of influence. As with the massacre of Kunduz over a year ago, when 147 Afghans were killed in a raid ordered by the German officer Georg Klein, representatives of the Left Party on the Defence Committee, including Christine Bucholz (a member of the Marx 21 grouping, which is in solidarity with the British Socialist Workers Party) and Paul Schäfer, were privy to this information.

Instead of informing the public about these war crimes, the representatives of the Left Party upheld their parliamentary vow of silence. This is not surprising. In election campaigns, the Left Party has tried to pose as an opponent of the Afghanistan war, but is always willing to relent if its support is actually needed.

At a point when the occupation of Afghanistan is in great difficulty, the Left Party is not prepared to expose the role of the German special forces in Afghanistan and appeal to the antiwar sentiments in the population. Rather, it seeks to prevent a debate about the war and the emergence of a broad movement against it. Not a single article on this theme has appeared on the web site of the Left Party since the publication of the WikiLeaks documents. Not a single leading member has demanded the immediate withdrawal of the *Bundeswehr* from Afghanistan.



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