

Ten years since WikiLeaks published Collateral Murder

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Yesterday marked 10 years since WikiLeaks published the *Collateral Murder* video, showing US soldiers in an Apache helicopter indiscriminately firing upon unarmed civilians and journalists in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad.

The footage, filmed by the US military on July 12, 2007, shows the gunship circling above a group of 10 men, going about their business in the suburb of Al-Amin al-Thaniyah. In increasingly exasperated tones, those on board ask whether they have been given permission to open fire on the individuals, who pose no conceivable threat.

When the signal has been given, they let loose with 30 mm cannon fire. The viewer's horror at the massacre is matched only by revulsion at the glee of the American soldiers.

As the 10 men lie catastrophically wounded or dead, a US soldier expresses his hope that one of them will pick up a non-existent weapon, so that the fusillade may be resumed. A van pulls up to give assistance to the wounded. It is fired upon, killing the driver and inflicting horrific wounds on his two young children.

At the end of the carnage, as many as 18 lie dead. They include Reuters journalists Saeed Chmagh and Namir Noor-Eldeen. Congratulations and more blood lust are the response from within the Apache.

The video has had an indelible impact on the consciousness of millions of people around the world. Its 39 minutes of footage exposed the real character of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq as an illegal, neo-colonial operation involving the perpetration of war crimes and an assault on the social and democratic rights of an entire population, unprecedented since the horrors of the Nazi regime.

A decade on and none of those responsible for the 2007 massacre depicted in the video, or for the illegal invasion which resulted in the deaths of over a million people, has been brought to justice.

Some, such as former US President George Bush and then Australian Prime Minister John Howard, are enjoying a quiet retirement. Others, including former British PM Tony Blair, remain politically influential and powerful figures, while

still more are at the helm of the US and allied militaries as they continue to perpetrate crimes in the Middle East, and plot new wars, including against China and Russia.

The only individuals who have suffered any repercussions as a result of *Collateral Murder* are Chelsea Manning, the courageous US army private who leaked the video, and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who published it.

Most recently, Manning was released from six months imprisonment last month, after refusing to give false testimony against Assange before a secret US Grand Jury. Behind bars without charge or conviction, she was again driven to attempt to take her own life.

Assange, after almost a decade of arbitrary detention, faces the prospect of extradition from Britain to the United States, where he would be hauled before a kangaroo court, convicted on espionage charges and sentenced to life in a supermax prison. Assange's only "offence" is having exposed the war crimes, global diplomatic conspiracies and mass spying operations of the American and allied governments.

Even before he has been extradited, all of the WikiLeaks founder's rights have been trampled upon by a corrupt British judiciary and political establishment. After years of abuse, his life is in imminent danger. The British government and the courts have refused to release him as the coronavirus pandemic hits British prisons, despite the fact that Assange is on remand and has been convicted of no crime.

The very individuals responsible for the crimes exposed in *Collateral Murder* are spearheading the attempt to destroy Assange. They include the US military and intelligence agencies, the American ruling elite's political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, and their allies in the British Tory and Labour Parties and the Australian political establishment.

The video revealed, not only the crimes of individuals, but the systemic criminality of the entire occupation of Iraq, implicating the military commands, governments and a pliant corporate media.

On July 13, 2007, the US military issued a statement which declared that the Reuters employees Chmagh and Noor-Eldeen, had been “killed during a firefight with insurgents.” An August 2007 Freedom of Information request for the footage, lodged by Reuters, was denied by the US government and the military.

Perhaps most damningly, the publication of *Collateral Murder* exposed the corporate press as an adjunct of the military as it was wantonly committing war crimes. All of the major publications in the US, from the *New York Times* to the *Washington Post*, had promoted the lies about weapons of mass destruction used to justify the illegal invasion of Iraq.

Manning had contacted those outlets, and others, but never received a reply, prompting her to turn to WikiLeaks.

At least some corporate journalists, however, were already intimately familiar with the crimes that politically radicalised Manning. During the invasion of Iraq they were “the embedded ones,” integrating themselves into the military and filing breathless reports hailing the decimation of Iraq’s civilian and military infrastructure and the catastrophe that befell its population.

In a 2009 book, David Finkel, a *Washington Post* journalist, described a scene that bore striking similarities to the 2007 Apache attack in Baghdad. His book was titled, without irony, *The Good Soldiers*. Finkel’s follow-up work was headlined *Thank You for Your Service*.

According to some sources, Finkel and the *Washington Post* had had access to the video since at least 2009. There are even allegations that the reporter showed it to friends and colleagues at dinner parties held in his plush Washington DC home.

The response of WikiLeaks, a tiny organisation with extremely limited resources, was very different.

Assange and a group of colleagues spent months decrypting the video, studying its contents and investigating the events it depicted. This alone should put paid to the claims of the corrupt corporate stenographers of the intelligence agencies that Assange is “not a journalist.”

Current WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hraffnson risked his life to track down the victims of the attack, travelling to Iraq two years after a secret US military document had outlined a strategy to destroy WikiLeaks.

Hraffnson met the widow of Matasher Tomal, the man who was killed while attempting to help those wounded in the first barrage of artillery fire. He spoke to Tomal’s children Sayad, who was 10 at the time of the attack, and Doaha who was just 5-years-old. Both suffered wounds that will affect them for life.

In an interview at the time, Hraffnson commented on the experience of speaking to Sayad: “When I was watching his

eyes [I felt] I was looking into the eyes of my own son. I think I have never been as touched by anything I’ve seen. The sorrow of a child who loses his father is so deep, so devastating. I really wanted to get that to the public.”

Asked by the interviewer if it had not been dangerous for him to travel to Iraq, Hraffnson commented: “Yes, but journalism should be dangerous. Journalists are becoming, and have been, a part of the military propaganda machinery—easily manipulated.”

For his part, Assange unveiled the footage at the US National Press Club, despite the clear danger that he would be targeted by the CIA and the US military.

All of those credited on the *Collateral Murder* video, including those who ended their collaboration with WikiLeaks many years ago, have been subjected to harassment and surveillance by the military intelligence complex, including having their personal details and correspondence subpoenaed from major internet conglomerates.

The *Collateral Murder* video will be remembered for decades as testimony to the barbarity of imperialist war. Its contents are more significant than ever, amid stepped-up inter-imperialist tensions and preparations for new and catastrophic military conflicts.

Workers, students and young people must do everything they can to fight for Assange’s freedom and for the safety and security of all those involved in this historic exposure of militarism and war.

Yesterday, WikiLeaks held an online meeting marking the anniversary of Collateral Murder, at which Hraffnson and others spoke. It can be viewed here.



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