

Wikileaks : Exposing War Crimes

By A Correspondent

Wikileaks has posted over 90,000 pages of US classified material chronicling incidents in the war in Afghanistan from 2004 through 2009.

These reports are written by military personnel-which means facts and descriptions of what happened may be skewed, things may be left out, censored, covered up, etc. But this material clearly indicates the depth and extent of war crimes being committed by the US and coalition forces in Afghanistan. Julian Assange, editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks told the BBC, "20,000 lives that have been lost in Afghanistan [are] documented and exposed by our material."

WikiLeaks—an international organization that publishes anonymous submissions and leaks of otherwise unavailable documents while preserving the anonymity of sources—first released these documents to the *Guardian* in the UK, *Der Spiegel* magazine in Germany and the *New York Times*. These war logs are now available at wikileaks.org and there are more than 15,000 documents WikiLeaks has that have not yet been made public.

There is a lot of material in these documents covering different aspects of the war in Afghanistan that requires analysis. But one thing is clear. These war logs record details of many hundreds of civilian deaths that went unreported or were unaccounted for or consciously covered up.

The power of the material, Assange said, lies in its accumulation of small, previously unknown details rather than any disclosure of one large event : "The real story of this material is that it is war, it is one damn thing after another. It is the continuous small events, the continuous deaths of children."

The WikiLeaks documents include accounts of what, in military jargon, are called "blue on white" incidents- in which soldiers wound or kill civilians. For example:

Coalition soldiers fire into a bus full of children, wounding eight. A US patrol machine-guns a bus, wounding or killing 15 of its passengers. Other soldiers mortar a village, killing a wedding party including a pregnant woman, in an apparent revenge attack. A group of US Marines went on a shooting rampage after coming under attack near Jalalabad—19 unarmed civilians were killed and 50 were wounded. They recorded false information on the incident.

US special forces dropped six 2,000 pound bombs on a compound where they believed a "high-value individual" was hiding after supposedly "ensuring there were no innocent Afghans in the surrounding area." A senior US commander reported that 150 Taliban had been killed. But local people reported that up to 300 civilians had died.

And these are only a few examples of what is in the thousands of pages of documents.

These war logs also document how these war crimes are being covered up :

In March 2007 a convoy of US Marines, after being hit by an explosives-rigged minivan, opened fire with automatic weapons as they tore down a six-mile stretch of highway. They hit just about anyone in their way-including teenage girls in fields, motorists in cars, old men walking down the road. Nineteen unarmed civilians were killed and 50 wounded. None of this, however, was reported in the initial military account written by the Marines involved. The Afghan Human Rights Commission published a report into the shooting which said the victims included a 16-year-old newlywed girl carrying a bundle of grass and a 75-year-old man walking back from shopping. There was an inquiry in which 50 witnesses, including Afghans, testified. But the four soldiers who fired their weapons did not testify because they had not been granted immunity from prosecution. In the end, no criminal charges were brought against any officer, although some did receive an "administrative reprimand."

A "black" unit of special forces, Task Force 373, is being used to hunt down targets for death or detention without trial. On October 20, 2007, they reportedly confronted Taliban fighters in a village called Laswanday, only six miles from a village where the Task Force had killed seven children four months earlier. The Taliban appear to have retreated by the time TF 373 called in air support to drop 500 lb bombs on the house from which the fighters had fired. Listed at the end of the leaked log : 12 US wounded, two teenage girls and a 10-year-old boy wounded, one girl killed, one woman killed, four civilian men killed, one donkey killed, one dog killed, several chickens killed, no enemy killed, no enemy wounded, no enemy detained. The US coalition put out a statement falsely claiming to have killed several militants and making no mention of any dead civilians; and later added that "several non-combatants were found dead and several others wounded" without giving any numbers or details.

September 2009, in Kunduz in the north of Afghanistan, NATO forces bomb a crowd of people surrounding two fuel tankers stuck in a riverbed. The military reports say the air strike was authorized "after ensuring that no civilians were in the vicinity" and the "battle damage assessment" claimed the 56 deaths had been "enemy insurgents." Media reports followed by official inquiries, however, established something closer to the real death toll, which included 30 to 70 civilians.

Again, these are only a few examples of what is in the thousands of pages of documents.

The accounts of civilian casualties in the WikiLeaks documents underscore a basic fact about the nature of the US war in Afghanistan. This is a war to further and protect the interests of US imperialism-not to liberate the Afghan people. This is a war for empire in which the US has set out to dominate this strategically crucial region of the world with unchallenged military and political power. And with strategic goals in mind, US occupation and intervention is digging in deep, pushing out and continuing to hold and expand military operations in countries throughout the region. A central goal in this war is subduing, by any means necessary, a population in which most don't want to be under foreign domination. The mission of the US occupation by definition is brutal and murderous - no matter how much it tries to justify the war as "bringing democracy" or "freeing Afghan women" or other lies.

So what did Barack Obama, commander-in-chief over these war crimes, have to say about this damning evidence?

At his press conference about the WikiLeaks documents Obama said, "The fact is these documents don't reveal any issues that haven't already informed our public debate on Afghanistan. Indeed, they point to the same challenges that led me to conduct an extensive review of our policy last fall. So let me underscore what I've said many times: for seven years, we failed to implement a strategy adequate to the challenge in this region, the region from which the 9/11 attacks were waged and other attacks against the United States and our friends and allies have been planned. That's why we've substantially increased our commitment there, insisted upon greater accountability from our partners in Afghanistan and Pakistan, developed a new strategy that can work, and put in place a team, including one of our finest generals, to execute that plan. Now we have to see that strategy through."

So first, Obama is trying to downplay the significance of these documents. And at the same time, there are many things in these leaked documents that point to real problems the US is having in Afghanistan, such as the reliability of government forces in Pakistan and the growing strength of the Taliban. And so Obama is saying that to the extent that there is relevant information here, it only justifies the continuation of more of the same and underscores the need to escalate troops and persevere in the current US counterinsurgency strategy. The White House is also trying to dismiss the documents saying they only go through December 2009-the month when Obama ordered his "surge." But can anyone seriously argue that the kind of crimes revealed in the leaked documents have stopped? □

[source : *Revolution*]