



EDITORIAL: Leaks reveal a failing U.S. policy

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America's failing policy in Afghanistan took another blow this week when the Wikileaks Internet project dumped 91,000 classified U.S. military and diplomatic documents on The New York Times, the Guardian of London and the German weekly Der Spiegel. The documents cover the last six years of the war.

Wikileaks founder Julian Assange said more documents are forthcoming. The material allegedly was provided to Wikileaks by a U.S. Army intelligence analyst who was arrested in May.

The Guardian concluded that, "taken together, the logs provide a revealing and important picture of how the war is being conducted: the continuing escalation of the conflict; the weakness of much coalition intelligence; and the gap between the polished account of the war offered for public consumption and the messy reality experienced by commanders on the ground."

Among the revelations, as summarized by the Guardian:

• Coalition forces have killed hundreds of civilians.

• Taliban attacks have increased greatly.

• "NATO commanders fear neighboring Pakistan and Iran are fueling the insurgency."

• Special Forces has a secret unit that hunts down Taliban leaders for "kill or capture."

• In a replay of how the Soviet army was defeated in Afghanistan more than two decades ago, insurgents have acquired surface-to-air missiles to shoot down American aircraft. U.S. officials had covered up that information.

• The United States is depending more on Reaper drones "to hunt and kill Taliban targets by remote control from a base in Nevada."

• The Taliban have massively increased their roadside bombing campaign, "which has killed more than 2,000 civilians to date."

The leaks are confirming evidence that this is a misguided war. "This is one of the many nails in the coffin," said Malou Innocent, a foreign policy analyst with the Cato Institute who specializes in Middle East security issues and has visited Afghanistan many times. "In recent months, there has been a relentless pummeling of the mission and the campaign."

She cited the Afghan war surpassing the Vietnam War to become America's longest; increased U.S. casualties, with more than 1,000 now killed there; President Obama's firing of the war's commander, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, for insubordination; and increased reports focusing on the corruption of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, whom American forces keep in power.

The leaks to the news groups also revealed the ties between Pakistani intelligence and Taliban insurgents, and even with al-Qaida. Ms. Innocent pointed out that "America has given Pakistan billions in aid since 9/11" to help fight the Afghan insurgents, largely because 70 percent of U.S. and NATO supplies flow through Pakistan to Afghanistan. Yet, she said, the Pakistanis are "playing a double game."

The Wikileaks data are being compared to the Pentagon Papers, which defense analyst Daniel Ellsberg disclosed in 1971. The Pentagon Papers revealed information on the Vietnam War that had been kept from the American people, as well as the government's own doubts about winning the war. Their release widened the so-called "credibility gap" between the government and citizens.

In the Afghan case, the American effort "needs to be scaled down to a terrorism-fighting mission," Ms. Innocent told Freedom Communications. "This more ambitious nation-building mission won't succeed."

She's right. It appears less and less likely that the current approach in Afghanistan will yield more safety for America or will advance significantly the U.S. pursuit of al-Qaida.

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