



Afghanistan flaws are mounting up

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

On Monday, Wikileaks founder Julian Assange said even more documents will be forthcoming. The documents allegedly were provided to Wikileaks by PFC Bradley Manning, a U.S. Army intelligence analyst, who was arrested in May and charged with transferring the data. He is being held at a military jail in Kuwait and faces 52 years in prison.

The material is a collection of raw documents, some of which has been verified by the news organizations. 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 fuelling 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. The information was covered up by U.S. officials.

The U.S. 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 seems to be confirming evidence that this is a misguided war. "This is one of the many nails in the coffin" of the support for the effort, said Malou Innocent, who specializes in Middle East security issues and is a foreign policy analyst with the Cato Institute. "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 American casualties, with more than 1,000 now killed there; the firing for insubordination of the war's commander, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, by President Obama; and the increased reports of 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 with Taliban insurgents, and even with al-Qaida. Innocent pointed out that "America has given Pakistan billions in aid since 9/11" to help the effort against the Afghan insurgents, largely because "70 percent of U.S. and NATO supplies" flow through Pakistan to Afghanistan. Yet the Pakistanis "are playing a double game."

The Wikileaks data are being compared to the Pentagon Papers, which defense analyst Daniel Ellsberg released in 1971, revealing secret parts of the Vietnam War that had been kept from the American people, and the government's own doubts about winning the war. Their release increased what was called the "credibility gap" between the government and citizens.

In the Afghan case, the American effort "needs to be scaled down to a terrorism-fighting mission,"

Innocent urged. "This more ambitious nation-building mission won't succeed."

Innocent is right. It appears less and less promising that the current approach in Afghanistan will yield either more safety for America or will advance significantly U.S. pursuit of al-Qaida.

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