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## WikiLeaks' Most Terrifying Revelation: Just How Much Our Government Lies to Us

By Fred Branfman, AlterNet  
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*"Try as I may I can not escape the sound of suffering. Perhaps as an old man I will accept suffering with insouciance. But not now; men in their prime, if they have convictions are tasked to act on them."*

-- Julian Assange, 2007 blog

Do you believe that it is in Americans' interest to allow a small group of U.S. leaders to unilaterally murder, maim, imprison and/or torture anyone they choose anywhere in the world, without the knowledge let alone oversight of their citizens or the international community? And, despite their proven record of failure to protect America -- from Indochina to Iran to Iraq -- do you believe they should be permitted to clandestinely expand their war-making without informed public debate? If so, you are betraying the principles upon which America was founded, endangering your nation, and displaying a distinctly "unamerican" subservience to unaccountable authority. But if you oppose autocratic power, you are called to support Wikileaks and others trying to limit U.S. Executive Branch mass murder abroad and failure to protect Americans at home.

These two issues became officially linked for the first time when former U.S. Afghan commander General Stanley McChrystal explicitly stated that the murder of civilians increases rather than decreases the numbers of those committed to killing Americans, and actually implemented policies -- since reversed by General Petraeus -- to reduce U.S. murder of civilians.

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McChrystal [said](#) that “*for every innocent person you kill, you create 10 new enemies.*” By so doing he made it clear that killing civilians is not only a moral and war crimes issue, but -- in today's interdependent world -- also threatens U.S. national security.

As important as is the issue of free speech, it is the question of whether the U.S. Executive is in fact protecting the American people through its mass murder abroad that really lies at the heart of the Wikileaks controversy. Executive Branch officials justify persecuting and threatening to murder Assange on the grounds that he has damaged U.S. "national security." If McChrystal is right, however, it is the past decade of U.S. Executive mass murder in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, now revealed beyond any doubt by Wikileaks, that is the real threat to U.S. national security.

The chilling fact is this: whether you believe that September 11, 2001 was due to incomprehensible fanaticism or genuine grievances, it seems likely that U.S. leaders' murder of countless Muslims since 2001 will cause the next 9/11 should, God forbid, it occur. The recent suicide-bomber in Sweden who came perilously close to succeeding taped a message saying "*so will your children, daughters, brothers, and sisters die, like our brothers, sisters, and children die.*" Similar sentiments were voiced by the Times Square bomber, and it is likely that those responsible for future American deaths will also be motivated by revenge for the hundreds of thousands of Muslims for whose deaths U.S. leaders are responsible since 2001.

This is not, of course, to justify such attacks. Any attacks on civilians, whether by the Taliban or General Petraeus, are totally unjustified and crimes of war. But if the issue is how best to enhance U.S. national security, it is critical to rationally discuss the most prudent and sensible means of preventing further attacks -- which in this case is to stop creating huge numbers of people who want to kill Americans. If General McChrystal is correct, every American should tremble at the long-term danger to America caused by the last decade of U.S. war-making in the Muslim world. If only 1/100th of 1% of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims are moved to want to attack America because of America's post-9/11 killing of Muslim civilians, for example, the U.S. Executive will have created a pool of 160,000 Muslims devoted to murdering Americans.

Nothing is more emblematic of the service Assange is doing Americans than the July 25 N.Y. Times [headline](#) announcing its publication of the Wikileaks "Afghan War Logs": "**View Is Bleaker Than Official Portrayal Of War In Afghanistan.**"

The N.Y. Times thus not only acknowledged that Wikileaks had supplied Americans with vital information about the war that its own government was denying them, but that this information had not been provided by the U.S. mass media. If it had been doing its job, after all, America's "newspaper of record" not Wikileaks would have long ago revealed that the Afghan war was "*bleaker than official portrayal of the war.*" The Guardian newspaper's headline on the same day drove the point [home](#): "**Massive Leak Of Secret Files Exposes Truth Of Occupation,**" i.e. the truth as opposed to U.S. Executive lies.

These "Afghan War Logs", like the Iraqi war logs after them, and much material in Wikileaks' recent release of diplomatic cables, reveal above all that U.S. Executive war-making is marked by massive deception of the American people -- particularly lying about (1) the enormous

civilian casualties the U.S. is causing and (2) its claim to be pursuing a "counter-insurgency strategy" designed to install a democratic Afghan government. The Times and Guardian stories describe how these official U.S. documents reveal constant U.S. Executive Branch lying to the American people.

-- **U.S. MURDER OF CIVILIANS:** *"A huge cache of secret US military files today provides a devastating portrait of the failing war in Afghanistan, revealing how coalition forces have killed hundreds of civilians in unreported incidents," (Guardian) "Incident by incident, the reports resemble a police blotter of the myriad ways Afghan civilians were killed -- not just in airstrikes but in ones and twos -- in shootings on the roads or in the villages, in misunderstandings or in a cross-fire, or in chaotic moments when Afghan drivers ventured too close to convoys and checkpoints". (N.Y. Times) "The Nato coalition in Afghanistan has been using an undisclosed "black" unit of special forces, Task Force 373, to hunt down targets for death or detention without trial ... The logs reveal that TF 373 has also killed civilian men, women and children and even Afghan police officers who have strayed into its path." (Guardian)*

-- **REGULAR COVERUPS OF U.S. CIVILIAN MURDER:** *"The dead, the reports repeatedly indicate, were not suicide bombers or insurgents, and many of the cases were not reported to the public at the time." (N.Y. Times) "War logs show how marines gave cleaned up accounts of an incident in which they killed 19 civilians ... There would be no punishment." (Guardian) "The logs detail how US special forces dropped six 2,000 lb bombs on a compound where they believed a 'high-value individual' was hiding, after 'ensuring there were no innocent Afghans in the surrounding area'. A senior US commander reported that 150 Taliban had been killed. Locals, however, reported that up to 300 civilians had died." (Guardian)*

-- **U.S. AND A CORRUPT AFGHAN GOVERNMENT ARE ALIENATING AFGHAN CIVILIANS AND LOSING THE WAR:** *"The documents illustrate in mosaic detail why, after the United States has spent almost \$300 billion on the war in Afghanistan, the Taliban are stronger than at any time since 2001 ... The reports paint a disheartening picture of the Afghan police (who) are often described as distrusted, even loathed, by Afghan civilians. The reports recount episodes of police brutality, corruption petty and large, extortion and kidnapping ... The toll of the war -- reflected in mounting civilian casualties -- left the Americans seeking cooperation and support from an Afghan population that grew steadily more exhausted, resentful, fearful and alienated ... The expanding (U.S.) special operations have stoked particular resentment among Afghans -- for their lack of coordination with local forces, the civilian casualties they frequently inflicted and the lack of the accountability." (N.Y. Times)*

When the Iraqi war logs were published 3 months later, they revealed even more shocking information -- particularly that U.S. soldiers had handed over Iraqi civilians to Iraqi police, knowing they would be hideously tortured employing electric drills, acid and other devices before being savagely murdered. Ellen Knickmeyer, the Washington Post Bureau chief in Baghdad in 2006, wrote that these revelations meant that U.S. officials had been lying daily to the U.S. media

-- and American people -- by saying they were not aware of this mass murder. U. S. leaders also lied constantly in claiming they were not tracking civilian casualties, when in fact they were.

Since international law made U.S. leaders responsible for providing law and order in occupied Iraq, these Wikileaks cables thus also revealed that U.S. leaders bear a major responsibility for these warcrimes, among the worst since the end of WWII.

Both the Wikileaks Iraqi and Afghan War Logs, in short, have revealed that the entire U.S. Executive is a "**vast lying machine**", as journalist David Halberstam described the U.S. military in his [affidavit](#) for the CBS vs. Westmoreland trial. It must be understood that "truth" vs. "lies" is not even an operational category within the Executive Branch or military. The purpose of communicating with the public is not to provide them with truthful information but rather to advance "the mission". People who communicate with the public obtain their jobs and are promoted on the basis of their ability to mislead, deceive, "spin" and lie. There is no recorded case where Executive Branch officials have been rewarded for telling the truth to the American people, and many where they have been punished or lost their jobs for doing so. And nothing so epitomizes the degradation of democracy in America that the fact the public **expects** Executive Branch officials to lie to them, and that mass media journalists even betray their profession by defending Executive secrecy and excoriating those who reveal their lies like Julian Assange.

It is thus impossible to overstate the importance of the Wikileaks documentation of these lies to the American people. When a journalist reports a U.S. government misdeed, government officials automatically deny it and many Americans are unsure whom to believe. But Wikileaks has revealed official government documents that prove U.S. leaders' lying and commission of crimes of war. The fact that the U.S. has covered up its mass murder of civilians, and that this is contributing to its losing the war, is thus no longer open to serious question. The callous and careerist politicians and journalists who daily ignore U.S. mass murder, while calling for Assange's arrest or execution, shame themselves, their children, and their profession by their indifference to non-American human suffering and obsequious toadying to illegitimate Executive power.

And the Wikileaks documents reveal something even more important: the entirely bogus nature of U.S. claims that Assange has damaged U.S. "national security", e.g. by revealing information that could help the "enemy." It is obvious that the "enemy" knows whether those murdered by the U.S. are civilians. The U.S. Executive clearly claims it is only killing "insurgents" to keep its murder of civilians a secret from the **American** people, fearing it would face protests that could tie its hands if it became known.

The Wikileaks documents, though they date from 2009 and before, also shed important light on what is occurring today under General David Petraeus.

It is important to remember, after all, that the Wikileaks controversy is not primarily about the past or abstract legal issues, but what is happening to actual human beings **today**. As you read these words countless Afghan and Pakistani villagers are huddling in their homes, terrorized by U.S. war-making, as General Petraeus's brutal offensive into southern Afghanistan, met by an increase in the Taliban's resort to roadside bombs and assassination, has caused the Red Cross to issue an unusual [alarm](#) saying that conditions are at their worst for Afghan civilians in 30 years, i.e. as bad as during the Russian invasion. A Canadian press [report](#) indicates that Kandahar's

main hospital is overflowing with civilian casualties, and that "*on some days, the floor is red with blood*".

Petraeus has [tripled air strikes](#), brought in 9,000 [U.S. assassins](#) who are conducting round-the-clock murder, and introduced an unprecedented number of night-time raids recalling Nazi movies from the 1940s -- as screaming U.S. soldiers break into people's homes, terrorize women and children, and kill, wound, torture or imprison men indefinitely without a trial or any chance to prove their innocence. Even the U.S.-installed Afghan President Hamid Karzai is so appalled that he has [begged](#) the U.S. to curtail its airstrikes and night raids, saying, "*the raiding homes at night. Terrible. Terrible. A serious cause of the Afghan people's disenchantment with NATO and with the Afghan government ... How can you measure the consequences of it in terms of the loss of life of children and women because you have captured Talib A. And who is this Talib A? Is he so important to have 10 more people killed, civilians? Who determines that?*"

Petraeus has firmly refused to end what this Afghan leader describes as the General's responsibility for civilian murder, making a further mockery of his claim to be bringing "democracy" to Afghanistan.

Particularly significant are the many first-person reports in the Wikileaks "Afghan War Logs" of U.S. murder of innocent civilians at U.S. checkpoints -- which flesh out McChrystal's March 2010 [admission](#) that "*we have shot an amazing number of people, but to my knowledge, none has ever proven to be a threat.*"

For this raises a basic question about Petraeus's vast escalation of U.S. airstrikes. If U.S. forces have murdered countless innocent civilians at checkpoints, where they can at least see those they are killing face-to-face, how many more innocent civilians is Petraeus killing from from the air, in bombing raids where those below can barely be seen?

And these Wikileaks documents also shed important light on how Petraeus's massive escalation into both southern Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he has dramatically escalated both U.S. drone and ground assassination, is weakening rather than strengthening long-term U.S. national security. Just as the Taliban is far stronger today after the U.S. has wasted \$300 billion and thousands of American lives over the last 10 years, Petraeus's tactics are strengthening not weakening America's enemies over the long run. If he murders enough people in southern Afghanistan, the General may be able to claim some short-term successes there. But there is no serious question that his tactics are sowing a long-term whirlwind which not only threatens the stability of the Afghan and Pakistani governments, but pose a long-term threat to Americans at home.

A U.N. map just [published](#) by the [Wall Street Journal](#) has revealed that the Taliban, using classic guerrilla tactics, has moved into northern and western Afghanistan as Petraeus has moved south, giving them control of more territory than ever. "*Internal United Nations maps show a marked deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan during this year's fighting season, countering the Obama administration's optimistic assessments of military progress since the surge of additional American forces began a year ago*", the [Journal](#) reported.

The N.Y. Times has [reported](#) how various insurgent groups in Pakistan have responded to Petraeus's tactics by coordinating and cooperating for the first time, vastly increasing the threat they pose to the Pakistani state. It is also obvious that Petraeus cannot possibly kill more "insurgents" than he is creating if he continues to provoke the 41 million Pashtuns on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to want to fight America. The population of North and South Vietnam combined during the Vietnam war was only 31 million, after all, and provided a manpower pool large enough to outlast 500,000 Americans.

In the end, however, the most profound questions for Americans raised by the Wikileaks documents go far beyond the Muslim world. If we can free our minds of a lifetime of official propaganda identifying the U.S. Executive with the American people, the evidence is overwhelming that in foreign and military policy the U.S. Executive Branch is an undemocratic institution that does not represent its own citizens. It operates largely independent of Congress, the Judiciary or a mass media which has largely become an arm of Executive power, broadcasting its lies far more often than it exposes them.

A few months before President Obama's December 2009 decision to send 30,000 more U.S. troops to Afghanistan, for example, only [24% of Americans](#) wanted to send more and 43% wanted to decrease the number. Their wishes were ignored, as are the opinions of Americans today who, by a [margin](#) of 63 to 32, oppose U.S. war-making in Afghanistan. And, Bob Woodward's Obama's Wars revealed, even the President is largely a figurehead when it comes to Executive war-making. Woodward documents how the military thwarted Obama's clear desire to begin a major pullout from Afghanistan in the summer of 2011. Last month, Obama was humiliated by being forced to endorse a hypothetical 2014 pullout date.

Most Americans would agree with the statement in the Declaration of Independence that governments derive "**their just powers from the consent of the governed.**" But the governed can only give their consent if they are **informed** as to what they are agreeing to. This is obvious in our daily life. I cannot be said to have "consented" to buy your laptop if you deceived me by not telling me it was broken. One of our most basic legal principles is that a contract is null and void if it was obtained under false pretenses. By revealing massive U.S. Executive deceit Wikileaks has thus revealed that it does not legitimately represent the American people.

These Wikileaks documents thus raise the most fundamental question citizens can ask themselves: to what extent to citizens of a democracy owe their allegiance to autocratic leaders who obtain the consent of their citizens through massive duplicity? And to what extent can they trust either their judgement or their decency?

Americans may find themselves increasingly pondering such questions in coming years, as economic decline and future terrorist attacks cause U.S. elites to bring home the authoritarian mindset that has caused so much damage abroad. It seems certain that American democracy will face greater challenges than at any time since the country's founding.

But that is a long-term question. The key question now is whether Americans can hear the sound of suffering their leaders are causing abroad, as at this very moment innocent men, women and



children are being murdered and maimed in what the Red Cross describes as the greatest civilian carnage since the Russians invaded 30 years ago.

Julian Assange should be applauded not persecuted for hearing the sound of their suffering.

Do we?