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Massive information leak shakes Washington over Afghan war

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Questioning and dissenting voices have been mounting over the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan since the website WikiLeaks disclosed late last month a multitude of secret military records on the nine-year-old warfare.

The 77,000 classified documents painted a gloomy picture of the fighting in Afghanistan, with some pointing to cover-ups of deaths of innocent civilians at the hands of the U.S. and allied forces.

The leaked information also cast a thick shadow over the reliability of America's key ally in the Afghan war, namely Pakistan, whose spies allegedly colluded with the Taliban.

More bombshells are expected to be among the around 15,000 documents the whistleblowing website said it was about to release. Some observers said WikiLeaks might use them to leverage possible countermeasures from the U.S. government.

The website Cryptome, similar to WikiLeaks, also claimed that these new files might have been "pre-positioned for public release" in case WikiLeaks is "taken down" by the U.S. government or anything happens to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

White House and Pentagon officials have so far refused to specify how to tame the information spillage, while lining up to condemn what National Security Advisor James

Jones called an "irresponsible" move that could endanger the lives of the U.S. and other foreign troops on the ground and threaten America's national security.

The Pentagon on Wednesday ruled out the possibility of negotiating a "sanitized" release of the remaining documents, demanding that "nothing further be released by WikiLeaks."

The latest leak is reminiscent of the 1971 disclosure of some 7,000 pages of classified military information by military expert Daniel Ellsberg, which triggered waves of nationwide anti-war protests and prompted the then U.S. government to end the Vietnam War.

Likewise, the Afghan war has come under increasingly heavy controversy and tight scrutiny. Many analysts said that what was poised to bear the brunt of the massive leak was the support for the protracted war, both on Capitol Hill and among the public.

According to Ellsberg, dubbed "the most dangerous man in America" by former president Richard Nixon, the WikiLeaks leak worsened the already strong doubt over the war.

On the one hand, the war has so far cost the United States about 300 billion U.S. dollars, but on the other, the opponents are becoming even stronger, Ellsberg said on TV days after the leaking.

The war in Afghanistan also involves "almost criminal political back dealings," Bradley Manning allegedly wrote in an e-mail. The U.S. army intelligence analyst has been detained as a "person of interest" in an official investigation on the Wikileaks leak.

He allegedly provided as many as 260,000 sensitive documents to WikiLeaks, whose revelation he claimed would make U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and thousands of diplomats across the world suffer a heart attack.

All these accusations and allegations, together with stubborn difficulties and mounting casualties on the battlefield, have also eroded the support coming from President Barack Obama's fellow Democrats.

When the U.S. House of Representatives approved late last month tens of billions of dollars to continue funding the war in Afghanistan, 102 Democrats voted against the measure.

In defense and damage control following the WikiLeaks disclosure, Obama said that the leaked reports "point to the same challenges that led me to conduct an extensive review of our policy last fall."

The Obama administration significantly adjusted its policy on the Afghan war in the autumn last year, authorizing 100,000 troops in the restive Asian country, triple the level from 2008.

The revised guideline also indicates that Washington would back the Afghan government's efforts to reconcile with those Taliban members who agree to denounce violence, resist al-QaIda and uphold the Afghan constitution.

However, the recent killing of eight international aid workers, including six Americans, by Taliban has subjected the new U.S. policy to serious doubt.

In addition, some experts with local think tanks have warned that the low efficiency of the Afghan government, the allegedly cozy relationship between Pakistani forces and the Taliban and the "extremely unwise" schedule set by Obama to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan would inevitably hinder the counter-insurgency efforts on the ground.

Admitting the challenges, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, David Petraeus, said earlier this week that "it's a gradual effort. It's a deliberate effort."

Yet apparently, the U.S. public's patience is wearing away. "The prolonged unending war has become a major drain on the morale of the U.S. armed forces and undermined civilian support in the U.S.," said James Petras, a professor emeritus of sociology at Binghamton University, New York.

With huge military expenditures and out-of-control budget deficit, the Afghan war would eventually ruin America and end Obama's "shameful presidency," he said in an article published in June.