

# Pentagon Papers 2.0: Afghanistan

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This set of documents is unquestionably the most important history so far of key parts of the US war in Afghanistan. These are reports of troops and commanders in the field to other military officials - this is where they tell the truth, to themselves. It is significant that the Obama administration has not tried to claim the reports are not accurate. What they are trying to do is to have it both ways: claiming that disclosure of the reports somehow endangers US troops, but at the same time disparaging the documents as showing nothing we didn't already know.

These reports, of events already past, are hardly likely to endanger the troops in Afghanistan - the people and insurgencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan don't need Pentagon documents to know what US/NATO forces are actually doing in their countries.

The documents probably will have a significant impact on the US/NATO war though - just not what the White House is warning of. These reports will likely stoke even greater global anger around the world, as evidence filters out to those far from Afghanistan and Pakistan who didn't already know what the US/NATO occupation looks like. That will certainly mean rising anger towards US policies and unfortunately towards Americans as a whole...but more importantly it will spur enormous anti-war activity in places like Europe, Canada, Australia, and Turkey. And that means greater pressure on those governments still providing troops for Washington's war in Afghanistan. And most important of all, they will mean greater pressure than ever on the Obama administration to end the war and especially on Congress to vote NO on next week's supplemental war funding bill.

There is no evidence yet of a new smoking gun among the individual documents. But taken as a whole, the documents provide a collective arsenal of evidence of a brutal war that never did have a chance to "succeed" - and evidence of what a government, through two administrations, were determined to keep secret from its own people and the rest of the world.

The documents chronicle escalating Special Forces' operations, drone attacks, and more. They describe activities like those of Task Force 373, a death squad that goes after named individuals on a kill-or-capture list. No trial, of course. Who knows how much of the intelligence that lands someone on that list is rooted in a neighborhood feud or tribal or political power struggle?

General McChrystal's and now General Petraeus's "nation-building" efforts are failing. In places like Marja, last spring's poster-city of a new US-backed "government-in-a-box," the hand-picked mayor-in-a-box, who spent most of the last 15 years living in Germany, is so unpopular that he has to be ferried into town on US military helicopters for occasional meetings, and then quickly whisked away. The much-heralded spring 2010 offensive in Kandahar is on apparently permanent delay.

I haven't read even a fraction yet of the 92,000 reports covering 250,000 pages. But the overviews provided by the international journalists who are certainly consistent with the view that the "counter-insurgency" approach is already giving way to an old-fashioned Bush-style counter-terrorism war. That would mean that claims that protecting Afghan civilians is most important, would fade in favor of acknowledging that the military's role is simply to kill whoever they decide are the bad guys. So if the war becomes more of an air war, and drones are called in to do more of the dirty work so US troops are not at risk, and more Afghan or Pakistani civilians are killed as a

result, well that's just part of the cost of war.

The documents include evidence of far more civilian deaths than were ever reported in the press. Many of them were probably never even mentioned - or asked about - in the virtually non-existent Congressional oversight of these years. They detail massive levels of corruption, extortion, and constant violence inflicted on Afghan civilians by the US-backed, US-trained and US-funded militias known as the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police.

And they demonstrate, again, the continuing links between Pakistan's top military intelligence agency, the ISI, and the top leadership of the Taliban- despite claims by Secretary of State Clinton and others in the Obama administration that Pakistan is a reliable US ally that just needs to work a little harder on going after terrorists. The Obama administration's answer to the documents simply repeats their efforts to blur the very distinct organizations known as the Afghan Taliban (mostly based in Pakistan but operating in Afghanistan) and the Pakistani Taliban (who target the Pakistani government, and against whom that government has indeed acted) into a generic presence in Pakistan known as "the terrorists" or "the Taliban." Pointing to Islamabad's actions against the Pakistani Taliban says nothing about their officials' ties with and apparent support for the Afghan Taliban.

The Wikileaks Papers provide a treasure trove of new evidence of what we already knew: this war has already failed. Every death, of Afghan civilian and of US or NATO soldier, is needless. Every dollar spent on military actions in Afghanistan and Pakistan is wasted. The cost of this occupation and this war - in Afghan blood, in US and NATO military blood, in the billions of dollars needed for jobs at home and real reconstruction in Afghanistan and elsewhere - is too high. We need to stop the funding for escalation now, bring the troops and contractors home, support Afghan and regional/UN diplomacy, and begin the long effort of making good on our huge debt to the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Maybe, just maybe, this 21<sup>st</sup> century Pentagon Papers - the 2.0 version: Afghanistan - will provide the spark of anti-war outrage to make that happen.

Next week congress is set to vote on \$33 billion to pay for Obama's already-underway escalation in Afghanistan — enough to pay for 500,000 good green union jobs at home and still have billions left to start paying down our debt to Afghanistan for real reconstruction and diplomacy.

Call your Representative at 888-493-5443 now. Tell your Congressperson that the WikiLeaks' documents confirm once again that the costs of this war are too high.

**Phyllis Bennis**

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\* From the Huffington Post:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/phyllis-bennis/pentagon-papers-20-afghan\\_b\\_659986.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/phyllis-bennis/pentagon-papers-20-afghan_b_659986.html)

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