

Afghanistan war logs: Massive leak of secret files exposes truth of occupation

Tuesday 27 July 2010, by [DAVIES Nick](#), [LEIGH David](#) (Date first published: 25 July 2010).

- Hundreds of civilians killed by coalition troops
- Covert unit hunts leaders for 'kill or capture'
- Steep rise in Taliban bomb attacks on Nato
- Read the Guardian's full war logs investigation

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/series/afghanistan-the-war-logs>

The war logs reveal civilian killings by coalition forces, secret efforts to eliminate Taliban and al-Qaida leaders, and discuss the involvement of Iran and Pakistan in supporting insurgents.

Photograph: Max Whittaker/Corbis

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, Taliban attacks have soared and Nato commanders fear neighbouring Pakistan and Iran are fuelling the insurgency.

The disclosures come from more than 90,000 records of incidents and intelligence reports about the conflict obtained by the whistleblowers' website Wikileaks [[1](#)] in one of the biggest leaks in US military history. The files, which were made available to the Guardian, the New York Times and the German weekly Der Spiegel, give a blow-by-blow account of the fighting over the last six years, which has so far cost the lives of more than 320 British and more than 1,000 US troops.

Their publication comes amid mounting concern that Barack Obama's "surge" strategy is failing and as coalition troops hunt for two US naval personnel captured by the Taliban south of Kabul on Friday.

The war logs also detail:

- How a secret "black" unit of special forces hunts down Taliban leaders for "kill or capture" without trial.
- How the US covered up evidence that the Taliban have acquired deadly surface-to-air missiles.
- How the coalition is increasingly using deadly Reaper drones to hunt and kill Taliban targets by remote control from a base in Nevada.
- How the Taliban have caused growing carnage with a massive escalation of their roadside bombing campaign, which has killed more than 2,000 civilians to date.

In a statement, the White House said the chaotic picture painted by the logs was the result of "under-resourcing" under Obama's predecessor, saying: "It is important to note that the time period reflected in the documents is January 2004 to December 2009."

The White House also criticised the publication of the files by Wikileaks: "We strongly condemn the disclosure of classified information by individuals and organisations, which puts the lives of the US

and partner service members at risk and threatens our national security. Wikileaks made no effort to contact the US government about these documents, which may contain information that endanger the lives of Americans, our partners, and local populations who co-operate with us.”

The logs detail, in sometimes harrowing vignettes, the toll on civilians exacted by coalition forces: events termed “blue on white” in military jargon. The logs reveal 144 such incidents.

Some of these casualties come from the controversial air strikes that have led to Afghan government protests, but a large number of previously unknown incidents also appear to be the result of troops shooting unarmed drivers or motorcyclists out of a determination to protect themselves from suicide bombers.

At least 195 civilians are admitted to have been killed and 174 wounded in total, but this is likely to be an underestimate as many disputed incidents are omitted from the daily snapshots reported by troops on the ground and then collated, sometimes erratically, by military intelligence analysts.

Bloody errors at civilians’ expense, as recorded in the logs, include the day French troops strafed a bus full of children in 2008, wounding eight. A US patrol similarly machine-gunned a bus, wounding or killing 15 of its passengers, and in 2007 Polish troops mortared a village, killing a wedding party including a pregnant woman, in an apparent revenge attack.

Questionable shootings of civilians by UK troops also figure. The US compilers detail an unusual cluster of four British shootings in Kabul in the space of barely a month, in October/November 2007, culminating in the death of the son of an Afghan general. Of one shooting, they wrote: “Investigation controlled by the British. We are not able to get [sic] complete story.”

A second cluster of similar shootings, all involving Royal Marine commandos in Helmand province, took place in a six-month period at the end of 2008, according to the log entries. Asked by the Guardian about these allegations, the Ministry of Defence said: “We have been unable to corroborate these claims in the short time available and it would be inappropriate to speculate on specific cases without further verification of the alleged actions.”

Rachel Reid, who investigates civilian casualty incidents in Afghanistan for Human Rights Watch, said: “These files bring to light what’s been a consistent trend by US and Nato forces: the concealment of civilian casualties. Despite numerous tactical directives ordering transparent investigations when civilians are killed, there have been incidents I’ve investigated in recent months where this is still not happening.

Accountability is not just something you do when you are caught. It should be part of the way the US and Nato do business in Afghanistan every time they kill or harm civilians.” The reports, many of which the Guardian is publishing in full online, present an unvarnished and often compelling account of the reality of modern war.

Most of the material, though classified “secret” at the time, is no longer militarily sensitive. A small amount of information has been withheld from publication because it might endanger local informants or give away genuine military secrets. Wikileaks, whose founder, Julian Assange, obtained the material in circumstances he will not discuss, said it would redact harmful material before posting the bulk of the data on its “uncensorable” servers.

Wikileaks published in April this year a previously suppressed classified video of US Apache helicopters killing two Reuters cameramen on the streets of Baghdad, which gained international attention [2]. A 22-year-old intelligence analyst, Bradley Manning, was arrested in Iraq and charged with leaking the video, but not with leaking the latest material. The Pentagon’s criminal

investigations department continues to try to trace the leaks and recently unsuccessfully asked Assange, he says, to meet them outside the US to help them. Assange allowed the Guardian to examine the logs at our request. No fee was involved and Wikileaks was not involved in the preparation of the Guardian's articles.

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P.S.

* From guardian.co.uk, Sunday 25 July 2010 22.03 BST:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/25/afghanistan-war-logs-military-leaks>

Footnotes

[1] <http://wikileaks.org/>

[2] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/apr/05/wikileaks-us-army-iraq-attack>