

Website Leaks Thousands of Afghan War Docs

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Foreign Policy

The website WikiLeaks.org released roughly 92,000 government documents related to the war in Afghanistan from 2004-2010 yesterday evening, after giving the documents to the New York Times, The Guardian, and Germany's Der Spiegel weeks ago (NYT, Guardian, Guardian, Der Spiegel, NYT). Composed in large measure of "secret" reports and cables from the U.S. military, the initial review of the documents reveals new details about multiple aspects of the war, including civilian casualties caused by international forces, the increased use of sometimes unreliable armed drones, Pakistan's alleged role in supporting various Taliban and militant factions and suspicion of Iranian involvement as well, secret special operations task forces that hunt Taliban and al Qaeda leaders, formerly unrevealed reports that the Taliban may have used heat-seeking surface-to-air missiles against coalition helicopters, and increased evidence that Afghan government corruption is undermining efforts to win over the Afghan population (Wash Post, AJE, CNN, Guardian WSJ, Atlantic, Danger Room, Guardian, Guardian).

The collection also documents the alarming rise in Taliban use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), noting that in the period in question that IEDs alone killed approximately 7,000 Afghans (Guardian). And C.J. Chivers has a must-read piece closely examining reports from Combat Outpost Keating, the isolated post in E Afghanistan that would eventually be nearly overrun by Taliban after it had been ordered to close (NYT).

Many of the reports document civilian casualties and links between current and former elements of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Taliban and al Qaeda (Guardian, NYT, WSJ). Details of civilian casualties come from 144 reports filed on different incidents, including last September's U.S. airstrike on a gasoline truck in Kunduz that killed scores of civilians, and incidents where American, French, British and Polish forces fired on or shelled Afghan civilians

(Guardian, Guardian). The reports also note high-level cooperation between the ISI and militants, from training to supporting plots to assassinate Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and an allegation that former ISI head Hamid Gul met with three presumed al Qaeda representatives in South Waziristan to plan a suicide bombing against U.S. forces (NYT, Guardian). However, much of this reporting came from single informants and Afghan officials hostile to the ISI, leading the Guardian's Declan Walsh to write that the reports, "fail to provide a convincing smoking gun for ISI complicity," in aiding the insurgency (Guardian).

American and Pakistani officials condemned the document's release (Bloomberg, AJE, AFP, BBC, NYT). The leak comes as House and Senate Democrats are debating how to approve additional funding for the war (LAT). And the documents also emerge when Afghanistan's neighbors have grown increasingly worried about closer relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, a fact that may change due to political pressure generated by the documents' release (Wash Post, Guardian, WSJ).

Back and Forth

U.S. forces searched furiously this weekend in Afghanistan's Logar province after two U.S. Navy personnel went missing Friday (LAT, Wash Post, NYT). While U.S. officials said the men were still listed as missing, a Taliban spokesman said and Afghan officials confirmed that one sailor was killed in a firefight, while Taliban forces were detaining the other (CNN, Wash Post, WSJ, LAT, Bloomberg).

The Taliban took control of the village of Barg-e-Matal in the isolated E Afghan province of Nuristan on Saturday, for the second time in recent months (Tolo, Wash Post). Reports Sunday night indicated that U.S. and Afghan forces were engaged in combat with Taliban elsewhere in the same district, and the Afghan Defense Ministry said Afghan forces had retaken the village (AP). And the Afghan government will investigate reports that an unidentified rocket struck a village in Helmand province, killing 40-45 civilians (Dawn).

Arrivals and Departures

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen took a whirlwind trip to India, Pakistan and Afghanistan this weekend, where he urged a crackdown on militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Haqqani Network, toured NW Pakistan by air, and expressed the U.S. commitment to Afghanistan and support for President Karzai's plan to reconcile some Taliban elements (VOA, RFI, CNN, ToI).

In a ceremony marked by VIPs, humor, and some regret at the way his career ended, Gen. Stanley McChrystal retired from the U.S. Army on Friday in a ceremony at Ft. McNair (LAT, Wash Post). And a new study of 15 months of data from Afghanistan has concluded that McChrystal's restrictive rules of engagement curbing air strikes and operations led to a drop in insurgent violence in some areas of Afghanistan (BBC).

Drones, Drones, Drones

Two suspected U.S. drones struck a house in the Angoor Ada area of South Waziristan Saturday, killing at least 16 fighters of unknown nationality (ET, BBC, AJE, CNN). Three subsequent strikes occurred Sunday, one in Shaktoi just inside South Waziristan, another the other near Miram Shah in North Waziristan, killing at least 19 fighters, and a third also reportedly struck targets in South Waziristan (BBC, AP, Dawn, WSJ). These strikes would mark 101 under Obama, and 50 this year.

Elsewhere, Pakistani forces claim to have killed 34 militants in bombing raids in Kurram and Orakzai agencies, while in the Naushehra district of Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa province, the Taliban allegedly killed the son of the province's Information Minister, who was openly critical of the group (Dawn, AP). A suicide bomber struck near the minister's home Monday, killing at least seven but missing the minister, who was not home at the time (AP, Dawn, AJE, ET). Partisan killings continued this weekend in Pakistan's financial capital of Karachi (Dawn, Daily Times, Geo TV). And Pakistani officials separately acknowledged that failed Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad met with Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud and other leading figures (AFP).

At least 30 Pakistanis have been killed in flooding in the southwestern province of Baluchistan, while the AP reports on Pakistan's worsening water crisis (CNN, AP).

Peace Through Fruit

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's offer last week to help Pakistan export mangos to the U.S. is only the latest instance of using mangoes to bridge gaps between Pakistan and others (ABC). The U.S. will help finance a \$21 million program to upgrade Pakistan's mango farming and processing infrastructure, though it is unclear if that will help the image of the U.S. in the country.

Source: http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/07/26/daily_brief_website_leaks_thousands_of_afghan_war_docs