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Days after the release of tens of thousands of documents that were once classified information and are now known as the "Afghanistan War Logs," the focus on the documents has shifted from the contents of the incident reports to what the effect or impact of the leak by Wikileaks will be on the war in Afghanistan.

The leak of more than 70,000 incident reports (and the news that 15,000 more incident reports are to be released after undergoing what Wikileaks founder Julian Assange calls "a harm minimization process" to protect Afghani civilians) created two direct challenges to what can be considered as two branches of government in the United States: the White House and Pentagon (Executive Branch) and the press (often regarded as the "Fourth Branch" of government).

This is part of the [official statement](#) released by the White House on Sunday, July 25th:

"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."

In a press conference on Monday, July 26th, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs showed there was [a small evolution](#) in the White House response to the leak. Similar to the official statement, he said the White House's reaction to this "breach of federal law" is that it has

the "potential to be very harmful to those that are in our military, those that are cooperating with our military, and those that are working to keep us safe."

Gibbs also said, "I don't think that what is being reported hasn't in many ways been publicly discussed, either by you all or by representatives of the U.S. government, for quite some time," and went on to discuss how the press was fully aware of how Pakistan may have "safe havens" that were aiding the Taliban and the White House had been making progress in addressing this problem.

Those who remember the Obama Administration's [blocking the release of photos](#) allegedly showing troops abusing detainees at prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan have likely heard this argument about risks to troops before.

[In a video](#) posted by The Guardian, Assange responded to the argument and said, "Militaries keep information secret to prosecute their side of a war but also to hide abuse." He noted there is a military argument for information on "where troops are about to deploy" from, but, since the information is all from 2004-2009, none of the information is particularly sensitive.

Gibbs' remarks that there's nothing new here with Pakistan shows part of the evolution from the initial response released to the press and public. The Obama Administration appears to have made a calculation that the nature of Wikileaks is too remarkable to wholly dismiss solely with an argument that they have used to argue for the protection of government information.

Admiral Mike Mullen's [tweet](#) and other remarks show that the Obama Administration has chosen to attempt to curb enthusiasm for the leak and forewarn those who are interested that if they take interest in them they will likely find no new information. If the public thinks there is nothing to be gained from the leak, then it's possible to push the public to question Wikileaks and possibly convince them that what was done was a kind of publicity stunt.

The initial response also demonstrated the White House believed Wikileaks should have consulted them before leaking the classified information to the press. That's interesting given the fact that the U.S. government has been hunting Julian Assange and displayed a zealous thirst to halt the operations of Wikileaks. Even more interesting is the fact that there was some back and forth prior to the publishing of the documents thanks to two reporters with the New York Times who [consulted the White House and asked the White House for permission](#) and guidance on what to publish and what not to publish. The meeting gave the White House time to

prepare for the oncoming document dump by Wikileaks.

[A file](#) circulated to press, which features many of the president's and the administration's leaders' remarks on the role of Pakistan in the Afghanistan War, indicates there was likely a development of a media or public relations strategy between the White House and the New York Times before the "war logs" went public July 25th. This file provided a way for journalists uncomfortable with the ethics of Wikileaks to cover the contents of the documents leaked. It seems like this .PDF file became the basic talking points for critical conversation among the press on the Monday after the leak.

The effect was that possibility of war crimes committed was, for the most part, conveniently omitted or glossed over; illumination of the US-assassination squad Task Force 373 was virtually absent from the publication's analysis of the logs on Sunday. Examine [Der Spiegel](#) and

[The Guardian](#)

and compare what is central to the editorials and reports with what is central to the editorials and reports

[posted by the New York Times](#)

. You will likely find media spin that focuses on Pakistan and the Taliban.

The New York Times' decision to take this to the White House and to not further explore possible war crimes committed or even the alarming number of civilian casualties detailed in the logs could have something to do with what Illinois State University Professor Anthony DiMaggio wrote in his book *When Media Goes to War* on the media's role in foreign wars:

"American journalists see their role in foreign conflicts as dutifully reflecting the range of opinions expressed in Washington. In the case of Afghanistan, both Democrats and Republicans lent their support to escalating war as of early to mid 2009. "Responsible" criticisms were limited to questions of whether the war is unwinnable or too costly. The Obama administration paternalistically denigrated the Afghan government for complicity in corruption, ballot-tampering, collusion with warlords, narcotics dealing, and a lack of democratic responsiveness. These criticisms were echoed in news stories and editorials."

DiMaggio notes the New York Times has supported this war even when the American and Afghan publics have demonstrated widespread opposition. Reporters supported Obama's

escalation writing, "extra [U.S.] forces" are "vital in defeating Taliban forces and "securing the region."

The issue of the Taliban and Pakistan provides opportunity for pragmatic criticisms and creates a range of debate germane to the interests of the White House. Such debate does not threaten the geopolitical interests of America or challenge the basic idea that the war must go on.

[Media critic Jay Rosen](#) concluded, "In media history up to now, the press is free to report on what the powerful wish to keep secret because the laws of a given nation protect it. But Wikileaks is able to report on what the powerful wish to keep secret because the logic of the Internet permits it. This is new."

Rosen's conclusion illuminates why Wikileaks is such a direct challenge to the White House and the press. Wikileaks does not care to protect the integrity of the security industrial-complex, which works to keep information properly or, in a number of cases, improperly classified. Wikileaks' "information activism" is in tune with the core philosophies that have been born from the existence of the Internet and, with the Internet, what does it matter if certain reporters find what Wikileaks did to be unethical or not?

The press in America is largely uncomfortable with the practice and ideology of Wikileaks, the credo that information organizations have spent economic effort on to keep secret should be public. No doubt, the press think if such a credo was supported by members of the US press media access to the White House and other institutions would be threatened. The socialization process that the press engages in with government officials in order to form ties so that news stories featuring top-ranked officials would also be inhibited.

For example, consider the digital journalism project published last week: "[Top Secret America](#) ." The Washington Post worked closely with the White House and other agencies. Had it attempted to do this under the radar with help from whistleblowers or anonymous sources, the White House would have condemned the Post. The reporters would likely have been fired from the newspaper and would likely be facing prosecution like James Risen, who wrote a story on NSA wiretapping under the Bush Administration and used anonymous sources.

Wikileaks' commitment to transparency is an affront to the press' role as an estate that

manufactures consent and the federal government's role as an entity that must protect state interests by crafting an official narrative for why the war must go on in Afghanistan, a narrative that Wikileaks pollutes with information from the government that indicates the official narrative is a constructed reality.

Historically, the US does not want the American people involved in deciding what the US does in its foreign policy. Julian Assange and Wikileaks display a belief in the value of citizen participation and interest in the business of governments worldwide. As Assange said of the leak, "People who are around the world who are reading this are able to comment on it and put it in context and understand the full situation."

The "bewildered herd" is supposed to be "spectators" and support the troops and trust the motives and actions of government. When the public becomes concerned, things happen like public opposition loud enough to dilute support for a war in Vietnam or civil disobedience against the use of nuclear weapons, etc.

The real danger to government here is that Americans might listen to [Emmanuel Goldstein](#), a well-known hacker and editor of the magazine 2600: The Hacker Quarterly, and promote values which support "getting to the truth of the matter, uncovering cover-ups." The real danger is that citizens may become too enchanted by Wikileaks and no longer believe in the "power imaginary" (as Sheldon Wolin might characterize it) that we are in an endless war for our lives with terrorists who hate America for its freedom and Afghanistan is an essential conflict in that battle.

The real danger is that the population abandons docility and no longer adheres to a civic culture that has been pushed by generations of political classes in America throughout the past century.

Consider the following passage from [NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security](#), published in April 1950 and possibly a kind-of "bible" for national security. This excerpt explains how "the democratic way" requires citizens to be less naive, more discriminating (ruling elite speak for politically ignorant and apathetic):

[In] the search for truth [the individual] knows when he should commit an act of faith; that he distinguish between the necessity for tolerance and the necessity for just suppression. A free society is vulnerable in that it is easy for people to lapse into excesses--the excesses of a permanently open mind wishfully waiting for evidence that evil design may become noble purpose, the excess of faith becoming prejudice, the excess of tolerance degenerating into indulgence of conspiracy and the excess of suppression when moderate measures are not only more appropriate but more effective.

The leak of the Afghanistan war logs creates a risk that an American public may lapse into excesses -- may start to challenge the idea that the U.S. troops must stay in Afghanistan and do battle with the Taliban, may start to dispute the arguments against withdrawal of US/coalition forces from Afghanistan, may start to doubt the motives and intentions of American superpower in Afghanistan more openly than before the leak. The danger is the leak might erode a sense of shared purpose in the country.

The threat this leak poses is not that it may require an immense overhaul of security apparatuses being utilized by members of the U.S. military on the 800-plus bases America has throughout the world. The Obama Administration can easily dole out another contract to some entity in the security industrial-complex to fine tune the system to prevent future leaks. The threat is that more and more will now grow disenchanted with American foreign policy and challenge the agendas of both neoconservatives and neoliberals who write the policies, craft the theories, and design the power imaginaries that Americans are made to understand in terms of "us vs. them."

The Afghanistan war logs challenge the world to do what the information activists at Wikileaks believe people should do. They should desire information and not, as people are trained to think in America, espouse concern about the illegality of the leak. They should read over the documents and make their own conclusions and not let media organizations disembowel the totality of the leak and tell them this is insignificant because much of the incidents detailed were already known. And, they should actively respond to the contents and more openly ask why it's so essential to continue the Afghanistan War.