



Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Ligue Internationale de Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté

Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad

Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO; Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO, and UNICEF.

THE AFGHANISTAN LEAKS: THE REALITY OF WAR, MILITARISM AND ITS HUMAN AND ECONOMIC COSTS

Historical Duplicity:

Military action and violence can be spoken of in terms such as 'security', 'protection' and 'defense'.

Historical Fact:

Enduring peace cannot be secured through violence!

Deaths and injuries to civilians, corruption, cover ups, scared young men with weapons, escalating violence, militarization, social and economic devastation. This could be written of any war, anywhere in the world, at any time in history.

Same old stuff - different day!

So why is anyone surprised by the contents of [WikiLeaks](#)' publication of an archive of over [91,000 of the US military's internal log of the war in Afghanistan between January 2004 and December 2009](#).

In fact, *is* anyone surprised?

WILPF supports, absolutely, the courageous actions taken by Julian Assange and those who have provided the information to him. His stated purpose was to bring home the "[every day squalor of war](#)" and he has done that. In so doing he echoes the reason for the creation of WILPF in 1915 to "protest the madness and the horror of war".

Wikileaks asked three newspapers to publish the files on its behalf. [The Guardian](#) (UK), [The New York Times](#) (USA), and [Der Spiegel](#) (Germany) have compiled and organized the files in different ways.

In summary, the reports confirm the following:

1. That there is a regular and barely acknowledged [loss of civilian life](#) in Afghanistan; killed by scared soldiers, soldiers seeking revenge, by technical defects in the use of smart bombs and [drones](#), by [accident](#) and through [negligence](#). Civilians, among them women and children, are well represented in the figures of dead and injured. Bizarrely a large number are killed by computer operators in Nevada who never get to smell the burning or hear the screaming, and can go home to bed as if they have just played yet another video game- which they have, just with real outcomes.

What does International Humanitarian Law (IHL) have to say about such things? A great deal in fact, which is why this report is so important. It shows that whilst the laws of war exist, they appear to have been flouted on numerous occasions but without real consequences for the perpetrators. In truth it exposes as illusory the idea of imposing laws of war in a situation of armed conflict, in an occupied country where civilians are simply "in the way" and as President Karzai said, "cheap". Men with guns will not be cautious in using them if they feel at risk and if they know there are no consequences if they get it wrong.

2. There are [extra judicial killings](#) carried out by Special Forces. Whilst this is violation of international human rights law, where are the accountability mechanisms? Strangely if these men are seen as combatants then it is likely that their deaths are in fact "okay" under international humanitarian law. What clarity do we have? What morality do we have?
3. The weapon of choice for the Taliban is [IEDs \(Improvised Explosive Devices\)](#) which have killed [NATO and Afghan troops, as well as over 2000 civilians](#). These would probably constitute illegal weapons or in the very least their placement, which causes significant civilian deaths, would be in breach of international humanitarian law. Again we are left with the question: is it at all possible to enforce this? To make them stop using such weapons?
4. The Taliban have [obtained surface to air missiles](#), possibly from [Pakistan](#) which receives [1.6 billion dollars in military aid](#) from the US. The irony of US taxpayers' money being used to provide arms to the Taliban to kill US and NATO soldiers, is palpable. Although obtained through the collusion or corruption of third parties, their use is legal, it's a war, these are legal weapons, they are being used against military targets. It's what happens.

Alternative Use of Resources

At the same time we have learnt that the cost of the war so far is a staggering [287 billion dollars](#)- that's **287,000,000,000** dollars. *Too many noughts to contemplate.*

In real terms this equals:

- \$300,000 cash payment to each person in Afghanistan, or
- \$933 to every person in the US, or
- \$4673 to every person in the UK.

This may seem flippant but it shows the magnitude of the wastage. Once used, a missile, bullet, or grenade is quite literally dead money; replacing it helps only the arms producers, the traders and the racketeers. If this sum of money were to be converted for human security use, such as for education, health care or sustainable development, your money would be invested over and over again by real people with real productivity - and ultimately in real and enduring peace.

Would the Taliban prosper in a country where the struggle for life was not the only game in town?

For tax payers in NATO countries and in particular the UK and the US, instead of spending your money on weapons that kill NATO troops as well as Afghan civilians, imagine what this money could have been used for.

1 billion USD (that's 1/287 of the total expenditure on the war in Afghanistan, remember) could pay for¹:

- **2,564,102,564** meals for hungry people
- **31,466,331** Child Immunisations against the six main childhood killer diseases - diphtheria, whooping cough, measles, polio, tetanus and tuberculosis
- **713,318** family homes.
- **270,196** Schools Furnished with desks, chairs, tables
- **53,504,548** Children supplied with school books for a whole year.
- **3,876,720** Adult Literary Classes.
- **3,030,303** World Response Medicine Boxes.
- **41,152,263** Nanny Goats
- **35,663,338** Chickens.
- **89,126,560** Training courses for a health worker.
- **25,477,707** Childrens School Desk and School Supplies
- **1,430,451** Vocational Scholarships.
- **100,000,000,000** Chlorine Tablets to make water safe to drink.

¹ Source: Cost of War Calculator hosted by Share The World's Resources
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom –
Telephone: +41 22 919 7080 Fax: +41 22 919 7081

The United States Congress has allocated over **\$1.05 trillion dollars** to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq over the last decade, and this figure does not even include the costs of the Obama administration's surge of 30,000 troops announced in December 2009. The human security 'trade-off' is often hard to fully appreciate: check out what the war in Afghanistan means to the real security and policy options of your community [here](#) and [here](#).

The Whistle blowers

The whistle blowers are also the victims of war. The [US administration has already denounced them as criminals](#) and [Bradley Manning](#) is facing the prospect of a 57 year prison sentence for his part in [exposing possible war crimes](#) committed in Iraq. There are serious legal and moral issues to be raised. Is it a criminal offence to seek to ensure that [the Geneva Conventions](#) are applied by your own State? To try to ensure that the public, in a democracy, is aware of what the government is doing in its name?

These events took place before the Obama administration under a regime which violated international law with impunity. Obama has the chance to restore concepts of law and morality in this case and he should do so. There should be no prosecution. If there is it then the military tribunal must comply absolutely with international human rights standards, which allows for the defense of greater necessity and pays due regard to the exigencies of the Geneva Conventions.

Action

Exercise your democratic rights to hold your government accountable. There have been calls for enquiries, for more rigid reporting of incidents and better training. To WILPF this is merely to feed into the chimera that there are rules in war and if only these were complied with and policed no one who shouldn't get hurt would be. We know this is nonsense.

Start/continue lobbying your government in support of a fundamental change of policy away from militarism and military solutions towards genuine development and realization of social and economic rights.