

A Long-Forgotten CIA Document From WikiLeaks Sheds Critical Light Today On U.S. Politics And Wars

By Glenn Greenwald – ICH

*The Agency knew that their best asset for selling their wars was **Barack Obama** -- the same reason so many in the security state were eager to get rid of Donald Trump.*

The first time I ever wrote about WikiLeaks [was back in early 2010](#), when the group was still largely unknown. What prompted my attention was a small [article in *The New York Times*](#) which began this way:

To the list of the enemies threatening the security of the United States, the Pentagon has added [WikiLeaks.org](#), a tiny online source of information and documents that governments and corporations around the world would prefer to keep secret.

The *NYT* explained that the Pentagon had prepared a secret 2008 plan in which they plotted how to destroy WikiLeaks, including by purposely leaking to it false documents with the hope that the group would publish the fakes and forever obliterate their credibility — a dastardly scheme which was ironically leaked to WikiLeaks, which [promptly posted the document on its website](#).

Any group that the U.S. security state includes on its “list of enemies” by virtue of publishing its secrets is one that is going to attract my interest, and likely my support. As a result — months before they made international headlines with publication of the Iraq and Afghanistan War Logs and diplomatic cables from Hillary Clinton’s State Department — I immediately investigated everything I could about the group’s founding and mission; interviewed its founder Julian Assange; and urged readers to help support the fledging group, concluding that “one of the last avenues to uncover government and other elite secrets are whistle blowers and organizations that enable them. WikiLeaks is one of the world’s most effective such groups, and it’s thus no surprise that they’re under such sustained attacks.”

The reason for my conclusion was that WikiLeaks had been exposing incriminating secrets of corrupt power centers for years. The technology they pioneered — enabling sources to leak to them troves of documents without anyone, including WikiLeaks itself, knowing the source’s identity — was a major innovation in enabling greater transparency for the world’s most powerful factions.

But it was one WikiLeaks document that particularly caught my attention at first: a classified 2010 CIA “Red Cell Memorandum,” named after the [highly](#)


[secretive unit](#) created by Bush/Cheney CIA Director George Tenet in the wake of the 9/11 attack.

What made this document so fascinating, so revealing, is the CIA's discussion of how to manipulate public opinion to ensure it remains at least tolerant of if not supportive of Endless War and, specifically, the vital role President Obama played for the CIA in packaging and selling U.S. wars around the world. In this classified analysis, one learns a great deal about how the "military industrial complex," also known as the "Blob" or "Deep State," reasons; how the Agency exploits humanitarian impulses to ensure continuation of its wars; and what the real function is of the U.S. President when it comes to foreign policy.

What prompted the memo was the CIA's growing fears that the population of Western Europe — as evidenced by the fall of the Dutch Government [driven in large part by the electorate's anger over involvement in Afghanistan](#) — was rapidly turning against the War on Terror generally and the war in Afghanistan specifically. The CIA was desperate to figure out how to stem the tide of anti-war sentiment growing throughout that region, particularly to shield France and Germany from it, by manipulating public opinion.

The Agency concluded: its best and only asset for doing that was President Obama and his popularity in Western European cities.

CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN



CIA Red Cell

A Red Cell Special Memorandum 11 March 2010

This memo was prepared by the CIA Red Cell, which has been charged by the Director of Intelligence with taking a pronounced "out-of-the-box" approach that will provoke thought and offer an alternative viewpoint on the full range of analytic issues. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the CIA Red Cell at (703) 482-6918 / 482-0169 or 44462/50127, secure. (C)

ia-afghanistan.pdf

Afghanistan: Sustaining West European Support for the NATO-led Mission—Why Counting on Apathy Might Not Be Enough (C//NF)

The fall of the Dutch Government over its troop commitment to Afghanistan demonstrates the fragility of European support for the NATO-led ISAF mission. Some NATO states, notably France and Germany, have counted on public apathy about Afghanistan to increase their contributions to the mission, but indifference might turn into active hostility if spring and summer fighting results in an upsurge in military or Afghan civilian casualties and if a Dutch-style debate spills over into other states contributing troops. The Red Cell invited a CIA expert on strategic communication and analysts following public opinion at the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) to consider information approaches that might better link the Afghan mission to the priorities of French, German, and other Western European publics. (C//NF)

Public Apathy Enables Leaders To Ignore Voters. . . (C//NF)

The premise of the CIA memo was that the populations of NATO countries participating in the War in Afghanistan did not support that war. What those allied governments and the CIA relied upon — as the above headline notes — was what the agency called "public apathy": meaning that the war's "low public salience has allowed French and German leaders to disregard popular

opposition and steadily increase their troop contributions to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).”

In other words, as long as the public stayed sufficiently inattentive, their democratically leaders were free to ignore their wishes and stay fighting in a war that the citizens of that country opposed. But what concerned the CIA most was that simmering dislike for the war in Western Europe would turn into active, concentrated opposition — as had just happened in Holland — forcing the worst of all outcomes: that the governments fighting with the U.S. in Afghanistan for close to a decade would actually have to pay honor the beliefs of their citizens that the war was not worth it, and pull out, leaving the U.S. to shoulder the burden alone:

... **But Casualties Could Precipitate Backlash (C//NF)**

If some forecasts of a bloody summer in Afghanistan come to pass, passive French and German dislike of their troop presence could turn into active and politically potent hostility. The tone of previous debate suggests that a spike in French or German casualties or in Afghan civilian casualties could become a tipping point in converting passive opposition into active calls for immediate withdrawal. (C//NF)

(d)
1303
C-06

French and German commitments to NATO are a safeguard against a precipitous departure, but leaders fearing a backlash ahead of spring regional elections might become unwilling to pay a political price for increasing troop levels or extending deployments. If

CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN

CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN

domestic politics forces the Dutch to depart, politicians elsewhere might cite a precedent for "listening to the voters." French and German leaders have over the past two years taken steps to preempt an upsurge of opposition but their vulnerability may be higher now:

Whatever happens, the one thing the CIA cannot not tolerate is having the leaders of allied countries "listening to the voters" (that's why the CIA has long preferred its "partner" countries be ruled by tyrannies: no need to accommodate bothersome public opinion). But even in western democracies, as long as the population remains sufficiently inattentive, the CIA reasoned, then their anti-war sentiments could be safely ignored.

The problem in 2010 was that there was an increasing awareness in western Europe at how anathema the War in Afghanistan was to their values, how wasteful were the resources expended, and how little any of it had to do with the quality of their own lives. That public opinion problem — or, one might say, the nuisance of democracy — was where, as usual, the CIA came in.

To solve the problem of growing anti-war sentiment in Western Europe, the agency devised two primary solutions: 1) exploit the plight of Afghan women to tug on the heartstrings of the Germans and French and try to persuade them — particularly European females — that the war in Afghanistan was really some sort of humanitarian project to help people,

not a geo-strategic effort to control the region and its resources; and 2) use the popularity among Europeans of President Obama, now a Nobel Peace Prize winner, to put a pretty, sophisticated, cosmopolitan face on the war in place of the hardened Evangelical Texan swagger that George W. Bush represented.

Tailoring Messaging Could Forestall or At Least Contain Backlash (C//NF)

Western European publics might be better prepared to tolerate a spring and summer of greater military and civilian casualties if they perceive clear connections between outcomes in Afghanistan and their own priorities. A consistent and iterative strategic communication program across NATO troop contributors that taps into the key concerns of specific Western European audiences could provide a buffer if today's apathy becomes tomorrow's opposition to ISAF, giving politicians greater scope to support deployments to Afghanistan. (C//NF)

French Focused On Civilians and Refugees. Focusing on a message that ISAF benefits Afghan civilians and citing examples of concrete gains could limit and perhaps even reverse opposition to the mission. Such tailored messages could tap into acute French concern for civilians and refugees. Those who support ISAF in INR surveys from fall 2009 most frequently cited their perception that the mission helps Afghan civilians, while opponents most commonly argued that the mission hurts civilians. Contradicting the "ISAF does more harm than good" perception is clearly important, particularly for France's Muslim minority:

- Highlighting Afghans' broad support for ISAF could underscore the mission's positive impact on civilians. About two-thirds of Afghans support the presence of ISAF forces in Afghanistan, according to a reliable ABC/BBC/ADR poll conducted in December 2009. According to INR polling in fall 2009, those French and German respondents who believed that the Afghan people oppose ISAF—48 percent and 52 percent, respectively—were more likely than others to oppose participation in the mission.
- Conversely, messaging that dramatizes the potential adverse consequences of an ISAF defeat for Afghan civilians could leverage French (and other European) guilt for abandoning them. The prospect of the Taliban rolling back hard-won progress on girls' education could provoke French indignation, become a rallying point for France's largely secular public, and give voters a reason to support a good and necessary cause despite casualties.

Afghan women could serve as ideal messengers in humanizing the ISAF role in combating the Taliban because of women's ability to speak personally and credibly about their experiences under the Taliban, their aspirations for the future, and their fears of a Taliban victory. Outreach initiatives that create media opportunities for Afghan women to share their stories with French, German, and other European women could help to overcome pervasive skepticism among women in Western Europe toward the ISAF mission.

- According to INR polling in the fall of 2009, French women are 8 percentage points less likely to support the mission than are men, and German women are 22 percentage points less likely to support the war than are men.
- Media events that feature testimonials by Afghan women would probably be most effective if broadcast on programs that have large and disproportionately female audiences. (C//NF)

But none of this would have worked, in the CIA's estimation, without having a President who could effectively use his popularity abroad to sell the war not as a barbaric act of endless aggression but as a humanitarian gesture that — like the President himself — was benevolent, noble, and kind. As a result of their positive views of Obama, the agency concluded,

the French and Germans would not only “be receptive to [Obama’s] direct affirmation of their importance to the [Afghanistan] mission” — that would be the positive reinforcement — but would also be “sensitive to [his] direct expressions of disappointment in allies who do not help.”

In other words, Obama was like a kind but righteous father whose nobility you believed in even when it came to bombing villages and shooting up schoolyards, and whose moral disappointment (you’re not living up to your duties as an ally) you were eager to avoid. Polling data thus showed that when Europeans were reminded that Obama supported the war in Afghanistan, support increased significantly:

Appeals by President Obama and Afghan Women Might Gain Traction (C//NF)

The confidence of the French and German publics in President Obama’s ability to handle foreign affairs in general and Afghanistan in particular suggest that they would be receptive to his direct affirmation of their importance to the ISAF mission—and sensitive to direct expressions of disappointment in allies who do not help.¹

- According to a GMF poll conducted in June 2009, about 90 percent of French and German respondents were confident in the President’s ability to handle foreign policies. The same poll revealed that 82 percent of French and 74 percent of German respondents were confident in the President’s ability to stabilize Afghanistan, although the subsequent wait for the US surge strategy may have eroded some of this confidence.

¹ European hand wringing about the President’s lack of attendance at a EU summit and commentary that his absence showed that Europe counted for less suggests that worry about European standing with Washington might provide at least some leverage for sustaining contributions to ISAF. (C//NF)

CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN

CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN

- The same poll also found that, when respondents were reminded that President Obama himself had asked for increased deployments to Afghanistan, their support for granting this request increased dramatically, from 4 to 15 percent among French respondents and from 7 to 13 percent among Germans. The total percentages may be small but they suggest significant sensitivity to disappointing a president seen as broadly in sync with European concerns. (C//NF)

It is hard to overstate how revealing this document is. Just months before the CIA heralded Obama’s unique ability to sell the war and ensure its continuation, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee awarded Obama its highest honor for [what it called](#) “his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples,” adding: “for 108 years, the Norwegian Nobel Committee has sought to stimulate precisely that international policy and those attitudes for which Obama is now the world’s leading spokesman.”

Yet the CIA, as it so often does, knew the hidden truth: that Obama's most important value was in prettifying, marketing and prolonging wars, not ending them. They saw him for what U.S. Presidents really are: instruments to create a brand and image about the U.S. role in the world that can be effectively peddled to both the domestic population in the U.S. and then on the global stage, and specifically to pretend that endless barbaric U.S. wars are really humanitarian projects benevolently designed to help people — the pretext used to justify every war by every country in history.

Many have questioned why the CIA would be so vehemently opposed to Donald Trump's candidacy, and then his presidency. Though he did question many of their most prized pieties — from regime changes wars such as in Syria to the ongoing viability of NATO after the fall of the Soviet Union — and did harshly criticize their intelligence failures (which is what prompted [Chuck Schumer's pre-inauguration warning](#) that they would exact revenge on him for doing so), it's not as if Trump were some sort of peacenik President. He [made good on his campaign promise to escalate bombing](#) campaigns in the name of fighting terrorism with [fewer constraints than before](#).

But one major reason for the contempt harbored for Trump among security state operatives is his inability and unwillingness to prettify barbaric U.S. actions and to pretend that the U.S. is something other than it is. Recall the fury and rage provoked when, in response to a question by Fox News' Bill O'Reilly about Putin's use of violence against journalists and others, Trump responded: "There are a lot of killers. You think our country's so innocent?"

 politics 2020 Election Facts First Election 101

Trump defends Putin: 'You think our country's so innocent?'

By [Sophie Tatum](#), CNN

Updated 2030 GMT (0430 HKT) February 6, 2017



Trump: 'You think our country's so innocent?' 02:05

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

"There are a lot of killers. You think our country's so innocent?" Trump says

It is an unusual assertion coming from the President of the United States

Washington (CNN) — President Donald Trump appeared to equate US actions with the authoritarian regime of Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) in an interview released Saturday, saying, "There are a lot of killers. You think our country's so innocent?"

The rage from that comment was obviously not driven by any doubts about the truth of Trump's statement. No sentient person would recognize it as anything other than true. The anger was due to the fact that presidents are not supposed to *tell the truth* about the U.S. and what it does in the world (just as Presidents are supposed to pretend they hate despots even as they support them in every conceivable way). As the 2010 CIA memo reflects, useful presidents are those, like Obama, skilled at deceiving the world and propagandizing them to view U.S. aggression as benign, so as to allow even democratically elected leaders to act in contradiction to public opinion when doing so suits U.S. interests.

As I [wrote in 2017](#) when the foreign policy community and pundit class feigned anger over Trump's embrace of the Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, as if support for tyranny was a violation of U.S. values rather than a staple of post-World-War-II U.S. policy:

What Trump is achieving by opening the White House doors to Sisi is not ushering in a new policy but rather clarifying and illuminating a very old one. This Trumpian effect — unmasking in all its naked ugliness what D.C. mavens prefer to keep hidden — is visible in multiple other areas.....

That's the reason so many in Washington — who never met a pro-U.S. dictator they weren't willing to arm and fund — are so upset by all this. Sisi isn't someone you invite over to your house for dinner; he's someone you send money and weapons to in secret after you give your pretty speeches in front of American flags about human rights and freedom. What Trump is violating is not any Washington principles or ethics but Washington propaganda tactics.

It's not just Trump who infuriated powerful U.S. actors by revealing the true face of the U.S. to the world. It's also Julian Assange who did so, by founding an organization that published documents like this one that revealed such vital truths.

For that exposure, the CIA relentlessly attacked Trump starting from before he was even elected, and for the same reason, Assange is sitting in a British prison on espionage charges from the U.S. Department of Justice. Few things infuriate U.S. foreign policy elites more than those who, unwittingly or otherwise, show their true face to the world.