

EDITORIAL

Secret papers

Dawn Editorial

Wednesday, 28 Jul, 2010 | 10:01 AM PST |

Truth is often the first casualty in any arena of conflict and this is where the crucial role of whistle-blowers comes in. The indignity and physical torture suffered by detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad or the violence inflicted on Iraqis in Basra by British troops would never have made headlines had it not been for conscientious individuals, westerners for the most part, whose moral compass had not been skewed by a seemingly never-ending war.

Now, after Iraq, it has emerged that Nato troops in Afghanistan wilfully under-reported civilian casualties in the battle in that country. The documents published the other day by the website Wikileaks show, in emphatic fashion, how Nato troops belonging to not just the US but also its European allies covered up their atrocities and failures in Afghanistan. A large number of civilians have been killed by mistake, we are now informed by sources that ought to have been official. At the same time, there seems to be an acknowledgment that the Taliban are not going to lay down arms any time soon. The skill and ferocity of the adversary was perhaps underestimated early on but certainly no longer. But the main point here is that major human rights violations appear to have been the norm since America invaded Afghanistan in an attempt to rout the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

There is nothing new in Wikileaks's allegations that Pakistan's intelligence apparatus is lending logistic or moral support to Afghan insurgent groups like the Haqqani network. This has been said dozens of time before, without any concrete proof proffered by either Nato or Afghan officials. Here it must be noted that reports incriminating Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence are usually based on 'information' provided by Afghanistan's leading spy agency, the National Directorate of Security. The NDS is dominated by personnel affiliated with the former Northern Alliance which, perhaps for good reason, holds a lingering grudge against Pakistan. In short, it is questionable if the views of the NDS should be accepted on face value. What we need are solid facts. And whistle-blowers are wholly welcome.

In any case, the Wikileaks documents have embarrassed Nato much more than Pakistan. It has highlighted not just the alliance's desperation in Afghanistan but also the questionable means it is willing to adopt in a war that remains outside of a time frame. Several thousand more field reports are still being vetted by Wikileaks and they make even more startling disclosures. All such charges, termed by some as war crimes, must be thoroughly investigated. Nato and Isaf cannot be allowed carte blanche in their activities in Afghanistan.

<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/editorial/19-secret-papers-870-hh-06>

