Media and War in Iraq: A Special Analysis of the Wikileaks

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Abstract

This review is concerned with "Media and War in Iraq: A Special Analysis of the WikiLeaks". Our analysis of the WikiLeaks on Iraq war suggests that hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed since the invasion of Iraq. On 22nd October, 2010 WikiLeaks released classified military records which included descriptions of approximately 66, 000 Iraqi civilian deaths in comparison to according to US. Until this time there have been contradicting estimates of civilian deaths in Iraq. The US military has maintained careful records of the number of American service members who have died in Iraq 4, 425 as of 2010 and the media evidently highlighted these details but never focused on civilian casualty figures in the US-led war in Iraq. This was done mainly because of the political stakes in a conflict opposed by many countries and a large portion of the American public itself. The widespread dissemination of the message which was always pro US government is a profound testimony of the US Media's inability to digest detailed reports emphasizing the catastrophic effects of US invasion on Iraq.

Keywords- Media, Iraq War, WikiLeaks, Democracy, Democracy promotion

Introduction

In today's world, media has made a very special place for itself in our lives. Media is like a mirror of the society which reflects each and everything about the society to us. But one also can not overlook this fact that slowly commercialization is also coming in media. Media has a huge responsibility of conveying the truth and relevant information to the common man. But somewhere this seems to be taking a back seat for media people as they are focusing more on commercialization. The way we think and perceive various issues about the world is also shaped up by media. Media plays a vital role in every one's life. Free, independent, objective media make people think, reflect and meet in an atmosphere of openness. At its best, media may promote peace and understanding. All too often, though, media are used to manipulate the truth, to exaggerate or to diminish facts. With the help of military or political power, and not

least, with the (mis) use of money, media can be a weapon of war, a threat to freedom.

The media informs the public, provides information, generates political ideas, mobilizes political and social action groups, and generally helps to shape the public policy agenda and priorities. The media also plays a role in creating political accountability and checks-and-balances, keeping an eye on public officials and institutions and constantly challenging them via reports, interviews, debates, etc. In order to provide the most classified information, recently media has also initialized the use of secretive agencies and spying the organization to unveil various controversial documents to the public.

In the "largest classified military leak" in United States history, whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks released nearly 400, 000 secret American documents on the Iraq war detailing graphic accounts of torture, killing of over 66, 000 civilians and Iran's role in the conflict. That date from the start of 2004 to 1st January 2010, mostly by low-ranking officers in the field. The latest leaked documents chronicling the Iraq war from 2004 to 2009 provide a new picture of how many Iraqi civilians were killed and opens a new window on the role that Iran played in supporting Iraqi militants and give many accounts of abuse by the Iraqi army and the police. WikiLeaks, which released the papers despite Pentagon's warning that it could endanger informants and reveal war strategy, called the document drop "the largest classified military leak in history"[i].

In order to understand the significance of this relevation, we need to understand the concept of WikiLeaks? What are the roles of WikiLeaks in shaping the Middle East political scenario? Another important question is who controls and oversees the selection, distribution and editing of released documents to the broader public? What US foreign policy objectives are being served through this redacting process? Is WikiLeaks part of an awakening of public opinion, of a battle against the lies and fabrications which appear daily in the print media and on network TV? If so, how can this battle against media disinformation waged with the participation and collaboration of the corporate architects of media disinformation? WikiLeaks has enlisted the architects of media disinformation to fight media disinformation: An incongruous and self-defeating procedure.

It is now agreed that information is often the most valuable asset of organizations. Consequently, the need for solutions to the phenomenon of data leakage is growing. The global economy may be hurting, but at least one sector of the information security industry seems to be gaining ground the data leakage prevention market.[ii] The review has been divided into three subthemes, namely media and war in Iraq, WikiLeaks: an overview and WikiLeaks and the US role in Iraq.

Media and War in Iraq

A recurring theme in debates on the future of Iraq is that the state is facing an imminent civil war among ethnic Kurds, Turkmens and Arabs, and among the Sunni and Shi'a Muslim sects. As tensions continue to escalate, the Iraqi media will play a crucial role in these developments. The pluralisation of a private media sector in post-Ba'athist Iraq has served as a positive development in Iraq's post-war transition, yet

this has also allowed for the emergence of local media that are forming along ethnic-sectarian lines. The Iraqi media have evolved to a stage where they now have the capability of reinforcing the country's ethnic-sectarian divisions. This review examines the evolution and current state of Iraq's media and offer recommendations to local Iraqi actors, as well as regional and international organizations as to how the media can counter employment of negative images and stereotypes of other ethnic-sectarian communities and influence public attitudes in overcoming such tensions in Iraqi society.

Media plays a very important role in forming a public opinion. In the run-up to the war with Iraq and in the post-war period, a significant portion of the American public has held a number of misperceptions that, as we will see, are highly related to support for the decision to go to war. Though the consensus view in the intelligence community is that Saddam Hussein was not directly involved in 9/11 and was not even working closely with al-Qaeda, in the months before the war numerous polls found significant majorities who believed that there was a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda, and that Iraq was directly involved in 9/11. In the January the Program on International Policy Attitudes/ Knowledge Networks (PIPA/KN) poll 68% expressed the belief that Iraq played an important role in 9/11, with 13% even expressing the clearly mistaken belief that "conclusive evidence" of such a link had been found.[iii]

Before the war overwhelming majorities believed Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Though it now appears this belief may have been incorrect, it does not seem appropriate to call this a misperception because it was so widespread at the time, even within the intelligence community. The US used a very common strategy of war propaganda, which is to who promote the negative image of the "enemy" may often reinforce it with rhetoric about the righteousness of themselves; the attempt is to muster up support and nurture the belief that what is to be done is in the positive and beneficial interest of everyone.

Hence the common people do not want war neither in Russia, nor in England, nor for that matter in Iraq. After all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.[iv] Similarly, the War in Iraq also resulted in vital causalities in terms of life and property. The exact numbers of causalities were debatable as media and various agencies presented different data on causalities. Wikileaks, an electronic media stroke whole debate down when it opened the numbers of civilian causalities in Iraq. This was a great challenge for American media and allies. Subsequent section will threw light on WikiLeaks and its reports about civilian causalities in Iraq.

WikiLeaks: An Overview
The wikileaks.org domain name was registered on 4th October 2006. The website was unveiled, and published its first document, in December 2006. The site claims to have

been founded by Chinese dissidents, journalists, mathematicians and start-up company technologists, from the US, Taiwan, Europe, Australia and South Africa. The creators of WikiLeaks have not been formally identified. It has been represented in public since January 2007 by Julian Assange and others. Assange describes himself as a member of WikiLeaks' advisory board. News reports in The Australian have called Assange the "founder of WikiLeaks". WikiLeaks states that its primary interest is in exposing oppressive regimes in Asia, the former Soviet bloc, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, but we also expect to be of assistance to people of all regions who wish to reveal unethical behaviour in their governments and corporations.

WikiLeaks is an international non-profit organization that publishes submissions of private, secret, and classified media from anonymous news sources, news leaks, and whistleblowers. Its website, launched in 2006 under The Sunshine Press organization, claimed a database of more than 1.2 million documents within a year of its launch. WikiLeaks describes its founders as a mix of Chinese dissidents, journalists, mathematicians, and start-up company technologists from the United States, Taiwan, Europe, Australia, and South Africa. Julian Assange, an Australian Internet activist, is generally described as its director. The site was originally launched as a user-editable wiki (hence its name), but has progressively moved towards a more traditional publication model and no longer accepts either user comments or edits.

Two important issues have been raised by the recent publication of secret American diplomatic cables. The first which affects all countries is the difficulty in deciding whether and how, in the interests of security, to share secret information among government departments. The disclosures are the price of a deliberate policy by the United States to share information more widely among its officials following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. The second, for Washington, is the need to restore trust in its diplomacy. The signs are that it is making progress with this. Hundreds of secret US embassy cables have been published by the WikiLeaks website and five newspapers since 28th November 2010.

Meanwhile, to silence the whistleblower website WikiLeaks and to prevent any more revelations of American war crimes, the "freedom and democracy" government in DC has closed down WikiLeaks' donations by placing the company that collects its money on its "watch list" and by having the Australian puppet government blacklist WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks is now akin to a terrorist organization. The American government's practice of silencing critics will spread across the Internet. Remember, they hate us because we have freedom and democracy, First Amendment rights, habeas corpus, respect for human rights, and show justice and mercy to all.[v] The Pentagon has previously declined to confirm the authenticity of WikiLeaks-released records, but it has employed more than 100 US analysts to review what was previously released and has never indicated that any past WikiLeaks releases were inaccurate. Casualty figures in the US-led war in Iraq have been hotly disputed because of the high political stakes in a conflict opposed by many countries and a large portion of the American public. Critics on each side of the divide accuse the other of manipulating the death toll to sway opinion.

WikiLeaks and US role in Iraq

In the Iraqi political history, the invasion and occupation is not a new incident. Before the US occupation, Iraq was occupied by Britain at the end of the First World War. But the US occupation and war in Iraq had profoundly changed the West Asia and Iraq in particular in an unprecedented way. This was the time when the US government led by George W. Bush toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003 in the name of 'democracy promotion' in Iraq. As Pradhan rightly pointed out democracy promotion had emerged as one of the key components of the US foreign policy towards the Arab Islamic World in the post 9/11 phase. The policy as such was not something very new to the Bush administration in view of the fact that the US foreign policy has always 'contained a powerful idealist element' and democracy promotion "abroad" has been one of its goals in one way or the other.[vi] The invasion and occupation of Iraq was thus, not a sudden action but it was a long term strategy planned by the US. The violence in Iraq multiplied after US 'democracy promotion' programme and occupation in Iraq. In the case of all four conflicts the actions of the US-led coalition either directly caused the rising violence or policy decisions they imposed contributed to its escalation.[vii] Before assessing regime change it is important to assess the extent of civilian casualties across Iraq. Given the ferocity of the conflict, the data on casualties is understandably variable and open to dispute. A new household survey of Iraq had found that approximately 600, 000 people had been killed in the violence of the war that began with the US invasion in March 2003.[viii]

Various methods have been used to count violent deaths in Iraq. Each of these methodologies used in these studies have its own set of controversies. A larger household survey (Iraq Family Health Survey 2008: 492)[ix] produced an estimate of 151, 000 violent deaths from March 2003 to June 2006: three times the Iraq Body Count (IBC) total for the same period but a quarter of the estimate by Burnham et al. Since the Iraq Body Count (IBC) figures have now (December 2008) reached a total of between 89, 878 and 98, 130, multiplying them by three would give a total of approximately 270, 000 – 295, 000. It has been argued that violence has recently been in decline, though it is unclear by how much.

The Brookings Institution (using somewhat rough-and-ready estimates, largely derived from the IBC) shows deaths of Iraqi civilians peaking at 34, 000 a month in the latter half of 2006 but then dropping sharply during 2007 and hovering around 500 a month in May–September 2008.[x] The IBC's own figures show a similar, but less dramatic, trend. Deaths by gunfire and executions have fallen from a peak of 56 per day in 2006 to 14 per day in 2008, but this was offset in 2007 by a rise in suicide attacks and vehicle bombings. Overall documented civilian deaths from violence totaled to 27, 600 in 2006, 24, 295 in 2007 and 9, 173 in 2008.[xi] The table 1 shows the documented civilian deaths in Iraq due to violence starting from 2003-2010.

The documented civilian deaths from violence in Iraq from the period of 2003-2010 and shows immediate after the toppling down of Saddam Hussein in 2003 the number of civilian death was 12, 083 which reduced to 10, 867 in 2004. It was again high in 2005 with 15, 152 civilian deaths and increased by 85% approximately in 2006 (period of civil war). But after this year the numbers of civilian deaths started declining like in 2007 it reduced by 12% (24, 761) and till 2010 the number of

civilian deaths was reached to 4, 045. The data clearly shows that after 2006 there was a continuous deceleration (Table 1).

Table: 1 Documented civilian deaths from violence in Iraq, 2003-2010

Month	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*
Jan	3	575	1048	1455	2853	756	276	260
Feb	2	608	1227	1461	2553	1016	343	297
Mar	3977	956	808	1802	2629	1547	416	334
Apr	3437	1290	1045	1608	2461	1266	489	380
May	544	622	1256	2125	2769	775	327	377
Jun	594	850	1228	2453	2119	679	491	368
Jul	648	791	1471	3184	2593	592	394	430
Aug	792	828	2195	2759	2358	596	585	517
Sep	557	943	1337	2423	1247	536	300	252
Oct	518	948	1212	2932	1197	522	404	311
Nov	483	1538	1321	2997	1065	476	205	302
Dec	528	918	1004	2726	917	522	457	217
Total	**12,083**	**10,867**	**15,152**	**27,925**	**24,761**	**9,283**	**4,687**	**4,045**
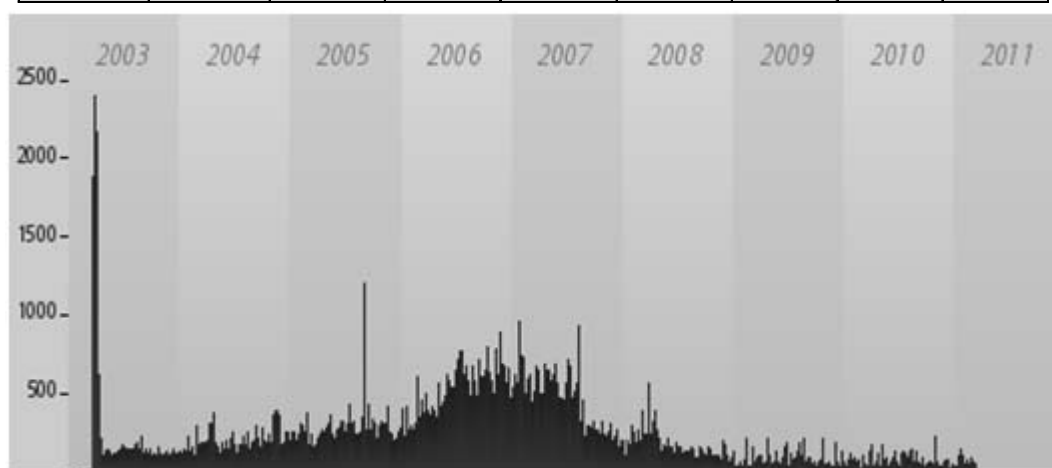
Source: Adapted From Iraq Body Count analysis of civilian deaths from violence in 2010[xii]

Table: 2 WikiLeaks Iraq Data on Civilian Deaths

Year	Coalition Forces	Iraqi Forces	Civilians	Total deaths	Total wounded, all categories
2004	747	1,031	2,781	4,559	18,567
2005	856	2,256	5,746	8,858	24,850
2006	821	4,370	25,178	30,369	41,164
2007	919	4,718	23,333	28,970	55,804
2008	282	1,948	6,362	8,592	23,632
2009	146	873	2,681	3,700	12,365
TOTAL	3,771	15,196	66,081	85,048	1,76,382

Source: Adapted From URL http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/oct/23/wikileaks-Iraq-data-journalism#data accessed on 7th May, 2011.[xiii]

The analysis of the WikiLeaks on Iraq War Logs suggests that 66, 081 civilians were killed since the invasion of Iraq compare to 3, 771 deaths among coalition forces and 15, 196 deaths among Iraqi forces. This analysis cannot provide an exact death toll estimate because the degree of correlation between the two listings (which almost certainly exists) cannot be measured. The WikiLeaks Iraq War Logs confirmed early reports of many civilian deaths.

The press analysis presented in October 2010 by the Washington Post and others is woefully inadequate at best, or deceptive. On October 22nd, 2010, WikiLeaks released classified military records which included descriptions of approximately 66, 000 Iraqi civilian deaths. Until this time there have been competing estimates of civilian deaths in Iraq. Since the beginning of the war, these estimates have tended to fall into two categories.

The first category comprises passive monitoring systems which use sources such as Iraqi government records, press reports, or these sources plus a corrective factor. 1, 2, 3 Reports based on passive monitoring have included a range of estimates that generally cluster around 50, 000 deaths by mid-2006 and greater than 100, 000 deaths as of today. These estimates contrast with the second category of estimates, population-based surveys and polls. Population-based surveys and polls have generated violent death estimates up until some specific point in time that were roughly and 20 times the passive estimates.

The New York Times was given exclusive US pre-release review rights to the so called WikiLeaks "Iraq War Logs" which were released on 22nd October 2010. The Times was careful not to attribute these findings to supporting a particular civilian death total. But, many US papers ran an AP wire service article that stated: "The US military has recorded just over 66, 000 civilian deaths, according to the documents

posted by WikiLeaks. Iraq Body Count (IBC), a private, British-based group that has tracked the number of Iraqi civilians killed since the war began, said in a press release that it had analyzed the information and found 15, 000 previously unreported deaths, which would raise its total from as many as 107, 369 civilians to more than 122, 000 civilians. The Iraqi government has issued a tally claiming at least 85, 694 deaths of civilians and security officials were killed between January 2004 and Oct. 2008."

This statement suggested that there was independent consistency among the reports, and perhaps even validation of estimates in the zone of 100, 000 civilian deaths in Iraq. Many papers like the Washington Post included statements in their coverage such as there appear to be no major revelations in the latest logs. On 22nd October the Post ran an editorial entitled, "WikiLeaks's leaks mostly confirm earlier Iraq reporting."

The editorial concluded claims such as those published by the British journal The Lancet the American forces slaughtered hundreds of thousands are the real attack on truth. Thus, the Washington Post explicitly, and other papers implicitly, sided with the narrative of Iraqi death tolls created by the passive surveillance sources like Iraq Body Count. Over the past months, a group from the Columbia University School of Public Health has evaluated Iraq Body Count's (IBC) finding that the 66, 000 civilian deaths reported by WikiLeaks only included about 15, 000 new death reports, and that by implication 3/4th of the deaths in WikiLeaks were already reported and known through the IBC online database. Such analysis was crucial to evaluating the Washington Post's explicit claim and the general press interpretation that the war logs provided no new information about the civilian death toll in Iraq.

After analyzing the various data which showed the causalities due to violence and activities related to violence, we can argue that the violence was widespread and varied in intensity in different years. Also, major affected group through this violence is civilians and normal citizens of Iraq. In December 2010, WikiLeaks released some 250, 000 classified diplomatic cables that embarrassed policymakers around the world, exposed classified government activities and provided ammunition to one side or the other, in any number of public policy debates-debates not limited to the United States.[xiv] It is even more dismal that the most recent release included information that identified critical infrastructure vulnerabilities. Earlier mass releases of classified information and unfiltered military reports from Iraq and Afghanistan placed the lives of US allies and pro-democracy forces at risk by, among other things, giving terrorist groups a "hit list".[xv]

In short, WikiLeaks is successfully waging a concerted disclosure campaign that, intentionally or not, damages US national security and interests via cyberspace. The group's founder, Julian Assange, for example, has primarily described his purpose as enhancing public insight into the operations of large institutions. According to Assange, WikiLeaks' goal is to create "a world where companies and the government must keep the public, or their employees, or both, happy with their plans and behavior".[xvi] To that end, he seems to believe that secrecy of any kind (and, perhaps by extension, privacy) cannot be justified: "The more secretive or unjust an organization is, the more leaks induce fear and paranoia in its leadership and planning coterie. Since unjust systems, by their nature induce opponents, and in many places

barely have the upper hand, mass leaking leaves them exquisitely vulnerable to those who seek to replace them with more open forms of governance".[xvii] Yet Assange ignored repeated warnings from the US government that he was placing lives at risk and quickly adopted the language of warfare, tweeting, and "The first serious info-war is now engaged. The field of battle is WikiLeaks. You are the troops, " and threatening to unleash the information equivalent of a "thermonuclear device" if he was arrested on pending sex crime charges.[xviii] Setting aside Assange's motivations, WikiLeaks' success at compromising classified information over time represents a kind of 21st century cyber siege.[xix]

Unsurprisingly, the Obama administration initially attempted to control the political damage, both at home and abroad, by downplaying the importance of the latest leaks publicly while apologizing to foreign leaders for insulting them in official government documents or compromising their interaction with the United States.[xx]

Conclusion

Probably every conflict is fought on at least two grounds: the battlefield and the minds of the people via propaganda. The media does play a pioneering role in framing this propaganda the later one. Overall, the results presented in this paper suggest several important facts. First, the findings suggest that there is an explicit and quantifiable role of media in forming a public opinion during wartime. The press already stands accused of not doing enough before the war to probe the Bush administration's arguments for the invasion, whether it was Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons or the prospects of implanting democracy in Iraq. In a 2007 survey by the Pew Research Center of journalists who worked in Iraq, more than a third said their poorest coverage was in the war's impact on Iraqi civilians. The most important ideology which media should abide by while attempting to cover a war and for a nation striving to understand it is that, they must share and seek only the truth out.

Acknowledgements

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