

The New Pentagon Papers: WikiLeaks Releases 90,000+ Secret Military Documents Painting Devastating Picture of Afghanistan War

Democracy Now! Episode from July 26, 2010

Video available at:

http://www.democracynow.org/2010/7/26/the_new_pentagon_papers_wikileaks_releases

It's one of the biggest leaks in US military history. More than 90,000 internal records of US military actions in Afghanistan over the past six years have been published by the whistleblower website WikiLeaks. The documents provide a devastating portrait of the war in Afghanistan, revealing how coalition forces have killed hundreds of civilians in unreported incidents, how a secret black ops special forces unit hunts down targets for assassination or detention without trial, how Taliban attacks have soared, and how Pakistan is fueling the insurgency. We host a roundtable discussion with independent British journalist Stephen Grey; Pentagon Papers whistleblower, Daniel Ellsberg; former State Department official in Afghanistan, Matthew Hoh; independent journalist Rick Rowley; and investigative historian Gareth Porter. [includes rush transcript]

Transcript

This is a rush transcript. Copy may not be in its final form.

AMY GOODMAN: It's one the biggest leaks in US military history. More than 90,000 internal records from US military actions in Afghanistan over the past six years have been published by the whistleblower website WikiLeaks. The documents provide a devastating portrait of the war in Afghanistan, revealing how coalition forces have killed hundreds of civilians in unreported incidents, how a secret black ops special forces unit hunts down targets for assassination or detention without trial, how Taliban attacks have soared, and how Pakistan is fueling the insurgency. WikiLeaks made the files available this week to the *New York Times*, *The Guardian* of London and the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, who agreed simultaneously to publish their reports on Sunday.

The documents, most of them classified as secret, give a blow-by-blow account of the war in Afghanistan between January 2004 and December of 2009. The findings include detailed reports on 144 attacks on civilians by coalition forces, ranging from the shootings of individuals to massive air strikes, resulting in hundreds of casualties; how a secret black ops special forces unit named Task Force 373 hunts down targets for assassination or detention without trial. The so-called "kill or capture" list of senior Taliban and al-Qaeda figures includes more than 2,000

names and is known as JPEL, the Joint Prioritized Effects List. The files also reveal how coalition forces are increasingly using deadly Reaper drones to hunt and kill Taliban targets by remote control from a base in Nevada.

The records reveal there has been a steep rise in Taliban attacks on coalition troops and that the US covered up evidence that the Taliban have acquired deadly surface-to-air missiles. In addition, the Taliban have caused growing carnage with a massive escalation on their roadside bombing campaign, which has killed more than 2,000 civilians to date.

And the files reveal NATO commanders fear neighbouring Pakistan and Iran are fueling the insurgency. According to the *New York Times*, the records suggest Pakistan allows representatives of its spy service to meet directly with the Taliban in secret strategy sessions to organize networks of militant groups that fight against American soldiers in Afghanistan and even hatch plots to assassinate Afghan leaders.

The founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, spoke about the files in an interview with independent journalist Stephen Grey for Channel 4 in Britain.

JULIAN ASSANGE: We have released 91,000 reports about Afghanistan from the United States military. The reports cover the period from 2004 to 2010 in minute detail. They cover essentially all US military operations, with the exclusion of some special forces operations and the CIA. It covers each civilian kill, each military kill that has been internally reported, where it happened, and when it happened. It is the most comprehensive history of a war to have ever been published during the course of a war.

STEPHEN GREY: And how significant is that?

JULIAN ASSANGE: There doesn't seem to be an equivalent disclosure made during the course of a war, during the time where it might have some effect. The nearest equivalent is perhaps the Pentagon Papers released by Daniel Ellsberg in the '70s. That was about 10,000 pages. But already that was about four years old by the time it was released.

STEPHEN GREY: And how many pages in your report?

JULIAN ASSANGE: There's about 200,000 pages in this material. Pentagon Papers was about 10,000 pages.

STEPHEN GREY: What can you tell us about the source of this material? How do you know it's — how do you know it's true?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, we know from looking at, you know, the material, correlating with the public record, speaking to confidential military sources, that this material is true and accurate. As to the specific source, obviously we can't comment.

AMY GOODMAN: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

The White House has condemned the publication of the files by WikiLeaks. In a statement, National Security Adviser Jim Jones said, quote, "We strongly condemn the disclosure of classified information by individuals and organizations, which puts the lives of the US and partner service members at risk and threatens our national security." Jones went on to say, quote, "The documents posted by Wikileaks reportedly cover a period of time from January 2004 to December 2009. On December 1, 2009, President Obama announced a new strategy with a substantial increase in resources for Afghanistan, and increased focus on al Qaeda and Taliban safe-havens in Pakistan, precisely because of the grave situation that had developed over several years," he said.

Well, today we're spending the hour on this unprecedented release of documents during the war with a roundtable of guests. Here in our New York studio we're joined by Rick Rowley, independent journalist with Big Noise Films, just returned from a six-week trip to Afghanistan, where he was embedded with a Marine division in Marjah. Joining us from Washington, DC, is Matthew Hoh, former Marine Corps captain in Iraq and former State Department official in Afghanistan, the highest-level US official to resign in protest over the Afghan war. Also in DC, Gareth Porter, investigative historian and journalist specializing in US national security policy.

But first we go to London to speak to independent journalist Stephen Grey, who has spent the past few years reporting from Afghanistan and recently interviewed WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange about this massive leak. He's author of *Operation Snakebite: The Explosive True Story of an Afghan Desert Siege*. And we'll go to Daniel Ellsberg in Mexico, perhaps the country's most famous whistleblower, who leaked the secret history of the Vietnam War that many are comparing this massive document leak to, 92,000 documents.

Stephen Grey, let's go to you first. You spent a good deal of this weekend with Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder who is responsible for this leak. First, talk about its significance and what he understood he was doing when he released these documents.

STEPHEN GREY: Well, I think this is part of, you know, WikiLeaks's strategy. I mean, it's been a — it's a snowball that started with fairly minor disclosures into something that is, you know, absolutely game changing. I mean, I think that this leak is phenomenal. It's almost an act of sort of cyber war journalism. I mean, this has completely compromised the US military's secret system. It's called SIPRNet. It'll probably cost them a billion dollars, I think, to fix it. And this is only the beginning. I mean, if what we're hearing is true, there are thousands and thousands of more documents to come out here. But, you know, the actual contents are also really significant. I've been spending the weekend as well looking through, as far as you can in a short period of time, these 90,000 documents, you know, looking at mentions of these task forces. They're special forces task forces. I actually wrote about this Task Force 373 before.

But it's really the extent of it. I mean, you know, I'm sure some of the other people you've got on today have also seen firsthand, you know, incidents like death of civilians. But it's really in the totality of it all that it becomes shocking. It's the fact that you've got absolutely everything here. OK, not the most secret stuff, but it gives an absolutely compelling portrait. I think it will take months, if not years, to really analyze it. It is — you know, the papers this morning, particularly *The Guardian* in London, I think have done a very good job pulling together some of

its conclusions. But, you know, it is incredible to see the raw detail there, and I think it will pull together an actually — an incredible picture of war.

AMY GOODMAN: As we are broadcasting this show today, the news conference is going on in London that Julian Assange is holding, revealing all of this. I wanted to turn to Daniel Ellsberg in Mexico. You're hearing of this release. Your response?

DANIEL ELLSBERG: I'm very impressed by the release. It is the first release in thirty-nine years or forty years, since I first gave the Pentagon Papers to the Senate, of the scale of the Pentagon Papers, and not the first as it should have been. I would — how many times in those years should there have been the release of thousands of pages showing our being lied into war in Iraq, as in Vietnam, and the nature of the war in Afghanistan? I hope there will be — I hope this will inspire, despite the charges brought against Manning under the UC, under the Universal Code of Military Justice, which is not civilian law, it's not First Amendment law. It's the military law, so he's in deep water here, as I think he expected. But nevertheless, I hope people will not be deterred from realizing that they have the responsibility that, according to the reports we've had of what Manning said in chat logs to the informant, Adrian Lamo, that realize that there is great deception going on, that there is, in Manning's reported words, horrific material, almost criminal, as he put it, which deserve to be in the public domain, that they will consider doing what's been done here, and that is risking their own career and their clearance and even their liberty, maybe for life, in order to save many lives. So, whoever did this — and Manning is charged with it — it remains to be seen whether the government can prove a case against him in the particular charges, but in terms of what he's reported to have said to Lamo, I admire very much the spirit in which he did this. He said that he felt the public needed to know this and that he was prepared to go to prison, even for life — he said that — or even to be executed. That's the first person I've heard in forty years who is in the same state of mind that I was forty years ago.

AMY GOODMAN: Stephen Grey, just to clarify, Dan Ellsberg is talking about Private First Class Bradley Manning, who was in Iraq, had — says he released these documents. He has now been arrested by the military. What did Julian Assange say about Bradley Manning? And this came out in his conversations with Lamo, another blogger online.

STEPHEN GREY: Yeah, I mean, like Daniel Ellsberg, he has, you know, praised what Bradley Manning has said about what he's doing, but he has not confirmed that he's the source. I mean, it's one of the beauties, if you like, of this technology that Julian Assange and his colleagues at WikiLeaks have developed, is that it actually protects the source. So what Julian Assange told me was that he himself does not know who the source is. What they do is verify documents, not sources themselves. So they're not able to actually verify that that was him. But, I mean, what was striking to me was that Bradley Manning said in his so-called confessions to this informer that he had released 265,000 documents to WikiLeaks. Now, they've published 95,000; they say they've held back 15,000. Add that up, I think there's 110,000. So less than half of what he's handed over has actually been published yet. So there's — you know, if he indeed is the leak — and I suppose you can — it looks pretty likely — then there's a lot more to come.

AMY GOODMAN: He's been charged with passing on fifty State Department cables. We're talking about the largest document release in US history, outside of Dan Ellsberg, the — actually, including Dan Ellsberg, in the course of a war. Ninety-two thousand pages are being released by WikiLeaks, the website, Julian Assange holding a news conference now in London. Daniel Ellsberg is on the phone with us from Mexico. Stephen Grey, who spent much of the weekend with Julian Assange, is on with us from London. We'll be joined by others when we come back. Stay with us.

[break]

AMY GOODMAN: An explosive story today, the release of 92,000 documents coming out of the military. We are joined now by a roundtable of people. Dan Ellsberg, the most well-known whistleblower in the United States, is joining us from Mexico. Stephen Grey, independent journalist who interviewed Julian Assange this weekend, is with us from London. We are also joined by Matthew Hoh, former Marine Corps captain in Iraq and former State Department official in Afghanistan. And Rick Rowley is with us here in New York, who's just returned from Afghanistan. He's with Big Noise Films.

Rick, your observations of what this six years of document release means based on what you've seen in Afghanistan?

RICK ROWLEY: Well, I mean, what these documents show — prove — is that the US military has been whitewashing the war in Afghanistan for years and that most of the media has been along for the ride. They've systematically covered up civilian casualties. They've covered up the successful attacks by the Taliban and their significance. And they've covered up the violent criminality of the security forces that we've created there, security forces that are preying on Afghan civilians. I mean, the picture that emerges from these documents is, on the one hand, of an insurgency that is resilient and adapting and that is winning the war on the ground, and, on the other hand, of an Afghan state that we've constructed there that looks less like a government and looks more like a patchwork of warlords and criminal gangs that's extorting the local population and that has become more hated in many parts of the country than the Taliban who they replaced.

A third interesting thing that these documents do is they put flesh on a process that we've been tracking, along with reporters like Jeremy Scahill, for some time, of a transition to what some people call a special forces war, an entirely covert and classified war that's conducted with drone strikes and midnight raids and targeted assassinations, where everything is classified, there are no media embeds, and there's very little accountability. I mean, I think that is the trajectory that this war is taking right now.

Now, the White House has responded. They haven't denied anything here. They haven't even denied the conclusions that people are drawing about how terrible the war has been there. Their response has been that this is old news, we knew about this a long time ago, and that, in fact, Obama's war, Obama's surge, the new war that began in December 2009, has changed everything. Well, I came back from Afghanistan ten days ago. And while I was embedded with the Marines in Marjah and elsewhere in the country, I can tell you that this picture matches perfectly with what's going on on the ground there right now. In Marjah, which was supposed to

be the poster child of this new campaign, Marjah — you know, it's a small farming community where two Marine divisions were sent in to try to prove that this war was still winnable. Those two Marine divisions have been pinned down for months. We were there at the beginning of an operation called Operation Cobra that was sending in reinforcements, a couple extra Marine companies, to try to, you know, push out their security perimeter. But it's the — Obama's surge has completely derailed. They haven't brought security to Marjah. They have one to three kilometers of security around their forward operating bases.

And the biggest disaster is that the government that they were — that they've brought in and tried to stand up, the famous government in a box that was going to roll out right after the Marines cleared the ground, has disappeared. The officials refused to deploy from Kabul and disappeared. Only the mayor comes in, Mayor Haji Zahir, who's brought in by helicopter by the Marines and, like, set down in the middle of shuras and meetings that they set up and then bundled back into a helicopter and flown out. And this guy, Haji Zahir, he's an expat who lived in Germany for years and spent five years in jail for attempted murder in Germany. I mean, that's the caliber of people who we've brought in to make the leaders of this new — of the Afghanistan that we're building. I mean, it is an abject failure, as far as a nation-building operation on the ground. And, you know, whether you're talking about the last ten years of the war or 2010, I mean, the picture doesn't change.

AMY GOODMAN: Matthew Hoh, you're the highest-level ranking government official to quit over the war in Afghanistan. You were speaking this weekend in Las Vegas at Netroots Nation. Your response to this massive document release?

MATTHEW HOH: That was just an excellent summary we just heard by Mr. Rowley. I think the thing to take away from this is the lack of attention paid to the war by the American public, the lack of involvement by the American media in this war for the last seven, eight years, and, most damningly, the lack of oversight by our Congress on this war. What these documents show — and it provides a very valuable historical record, and this is going to be — this is really a treasure trove for historians for years to come, because it documents daily the actions of the war. And one thing I would be very hesitant — I want to push people on is understand what war is. You know that axiom of war is hell. I hope people learn from these documents, that's exactly it, and not attach moral colorations of good and evil to these reports. But this is the basic nature of warfare, and this is what it's been like, and it's been consistent since really '04, in terms of how poorly things have been going on in Afghanistan. And I shouldn't say "consistent," because every year, as we've increased troops, it's gotten worse and worse. So, I think these documents are providing a valuable service. But like I said, the main point to take away is that why weren't we paying attention to this these last five or six years? Where was the media? Where was the American public's interest? And most importantly, where was that congressional oversight?

AMY GOODMAN: Matthew Hoh, you're a Marine Corps captain. You served in Afghanistan as a government official. What were you most shocked by in these reports?

MATTHEW HOH: I wasn't shocked by anything. These are your standard reports that the military produces internally for a host of reasons. These are reports that are done on a daily basis. They're reports that are done based upon intelligence activity or based upon what we call

significant activities, or SIGACTs. So it really was just very similar to the things I saw in both Iraq and Afghanistan in terms of reporting. The daily actions, the actual what occurs in the course of a day at war, that's what these documents show. I certainly have not gone through as many as I should by now, but they seem to be your standard reports that the military uses to communicate internally with itself.

AMY GOODMAN: I want to turn to Gareth Porter. Can you talk about the documents that refer to Pakistan aiding the insurgency, the Pakistani ISI, the spy services, working with the forces in Afghanistan who are killing US soldiers?

GARETH PORTER: Yes. This is perhaps the closest thing to a major story that — in terms of news value that comes out of the collection of documents that have just been leaked. And this is a story that is extremely important politically, in terms of US politics and US policy, because of the Obama administration's admission that it is vital that Pakistan assist the United States in preventing the Afghan Taliban from having the sort of safe havens in Pakistan that they've had in the past. Now, you know, what these documents are indicating is that there's lots of evidence that Pakistan's intelligence service, ISI, has indeed been meeting with the Taliban commanders. And although, you know, the American intelligence people were not there on the ground, nor Afghan intelligence people, not there on the ground at those meetings, the supposition was obviously that what's going on here is that Pakistan's intelligence is working closely with the Taliban in terms of planning their strategy, and indeed even specific operations.

And this is an extremely damaging story in terms of the fragility of the US war in Afghanistan at this very moment, which is in an advanced stage of basically being — suffering from political — being overwhelmed by political opposition or a lack of support. I would say that it's not too much to say that the Afghan war today is on political life support. It is really very, very close to the position of the Iraq war, George Bush's Iraq war, in very late 2006, when Bush was forced to make some very fundamental decisions about what he was going to do about that war. And in that situation, I think the Obama administration is quite vulnerable to being attacked politically for having a policy that is so clearly unrealistic, that it should be completely reassessed and start heading for the exits. In other words, the information — the new information about Pakistan, which simply reiterates and conforms to what we already know, essentially, about the Pakistani policy of cooperating closely with the Taliban, is a death warrant for any possibility of success of this war. And it should be the basis for new calls for a US exit strategy being put as the top priority right now.

AMY GOODMAN: The Pakistani ambassador to Washington, Husain Haqqani, vehemently denied claims the country's intelligence agency, ISI, has backed the Taliban. He said, "I think that the American leadership knows what Pakistan is doing. We have paid a price in treasure and blood over the past two years. More Pakistanis have been killed by terrorists, including our military officers and intelligence service." And, of course, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton just promised Pakistan another \$500 million in aid. Gareth?

GARETH PORTER: Well, what the ambassador is doing here, of course, is exactly what US officials have done over the past year or so, which is to talk about the militants in Pakistan as though — you know, without differentiating between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani neo-

Taliban, to talk about the fact that, yes, the Pakistani government has made progress in dealing with the militants in Pakistan. Well, yes, they have. They've changed their policy significantly in terms of dealing with the Pakistani Taliban, but they have not changed their policy with regard to the Afghan Taliban. That's quite clear. And what you have — it's very interesting — the Obama administration just issued an eight-page paper yesterday which responds to this story, which is made up solely of public statements by US officials over the past year and a half or so about this question of US policy toward Pakistan and the Taliban. And what you find in these statements is utter unwillingness to specifically say right out loud that Pakistan is not only not cooperating with the United States on this issue, but there's no reason to believe that they're going to, because they don't believe it's in their interest to cooperate with the United States against the Taliban.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to go back to Stephen Grey in London, who spent part of the weekend with Julian Assange, who's released these documents, the founder of WikiLeaks. In a minute, I want ask you, Stephen, and also go to Dan Ellsberg, about how Julian Assange is being hounded as he travels the world. But first, the special forces, talk more about 373, Task Force 373.

STEPHEN GREY: Absolutely. There hasn't been much disclosed before. I did actually write about it in this book I wrote in a title — a chapter called "The Manhunt," because what I noticed is that this war is divided into the public version, if you like, the softer hearts and minds stuff, but if you look at the history of counterinsurgency, you'll know that actually counterinsurgency is not a soft option, and therefore there is this unseen side of the war, which actually has become more and more dominant, which is basically manhunt. You have these kill-or-capture units. They change their code names regularly. But Task Force 373 has been one of those units. And what they're doing is systematically going around and — well, they call it decapitation, removing the sort of the head of this organization that they call the Taliban, and thinking that that will destabilize the Taliban and win. Of course, you know, under the laws of war —

AMY GOODMAN: We just lost Stephen Grey, but we're going to go back to him in a minute. Let me ask the question to Rick Rowley about Task Force 373, about the whole issue of this special forces war.

RICK ROWLEY: Yeah. Well, I think journalists like Jeremy Scahill and others have been tracking this for a while, that as the nation-building project fails in Afghanistan — and, I mean, this year was supposed to be the year of nation building. Marjah was supposed to be the prelude to Kandahar. Both of those have been rebranded, canceled, completely dramatically changed. There's been a massive escalation of a second option, which is the special forces war, an entirely covert war. So, I mean, and you're seeing this publicly discussed now. This is the sign of the future. You know, there was the recent *Newsweek* on it. There's people publicly in the administration talking about this. When we abandon the nation-building project, which everyone recognizes is an abject failure, the new form, paradigm, the war is going to take is drone strikes and special forces raids and midnight assassinations and capturing and abducting people. I mean, this — if you look at the press releases every day, every week, that NATO and ISAF put out, you can see that the majority of the kinetic action, the military calls it, the majority of the people killed and captured, are done by special forces. So there is no real information about them at all.

It's all entirely secret. And these are just the ones that are made public. Many more of them aren't made public. These documents that were released, you know, they occasionally cover — in slant ways cover special forces operations, but all of that stuff is a different level of classified.

So, I mean, it's absolutely true that there are two parallel wars going on: there's the war for hearts and minds, which is increasingly just a distraction, that the media have access to, where they have a very restricted rules of engagement, where they don't use as many air strikes; and then there's a special forces war, where it's, you know, all systems go, where there aren't the same restrictions, where they routinely kill people who don't represent the same kind of — don't reach the same kind of threat level that they would have to in the conventional war. So I think this is going to be one of the most significant stories going forward into the future, is tracking through these documents how — the evolution of this new kind of war there.

AMY GOODMAN: Stephen Grey, you were just getting into Task Force 373.

STEPHEN GREY: Yeah, I'm not sure quite where you lost me there, but I was just saying that there's this parallel war, and 373 is involved in what they call decapitation operations. They believe that there is a — the Taliban as an organization can be defeated by removing its head and that getting rid of all these leaders will destabilize and help them to win. But it's actually a very conventional way of viewing things, and it goes completely counter to the idea of actually having a peace settlement, because if you remove the leadership of an organization, you have no one to negotiate with, and you end up with a sort of constantly rejuvenated rebellion, which I think is what it is, of more and more extreme people. So it's very questionable whether this thing is actually, you know, productive at all, even in this very conventional way. I mean, I think what comes across overall is that — you know, is that the war is being fought in a very conventional way, despite what's being said. You know, there's all this talk — it's always about how many enemy did we kill. It's all seen in a very sort of — you know, it's as if it's kind of like a World War II situation. You know, you really wonder whether the lessons have been learned.

I also think that even the talk of Pakistan — and I think that's — it's an example of the US being played. I think there's a lot of paranoia there. They're being fed information by Afghan intelligence, who — where they get most of their intelligence from, you know? And they see it this great sanctuary, if only we, you know, weren't — it's just like Vietnam, they say. You know, if only we could cross the border, you know, and defeat that sanctuary, somehow this will all go away. I don't think it's like that. I think it's a very complex problem, and I think a lot of it's to do with a straightforward rebellion and unpopularity of the Afghan government, which the US is supporting.

AMY GOODMAN: As I said, as we're broadcasting, Julian Assange is holding a news conference in London. Let's just go to a clip of that news conference right now with the founder of WikiLeaks who released the — well, this unprecedented 92,000 pages of documents.

JULIAN ASSANGE: I suppose our greatest fear is that we will be too successful too fast, and we won't be able to do justice to the material we're getting in fast enough. That's our greatest problem at the moment.

REPORTER: Do you accept that secrecy is an important and a necessary part of government [inaudible]?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Secrecy is sometimes perfectly legitimate. For example, your medical records with your doctor are probably, in all likelihood, perfectly entitled to confidentiality. But not always. There'll be some cases where that is not true.

REPORTER: So, you make the choice then? You at WikiLeaks would make [inaudible]

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, it's a matter about whether the coercive power of the state should be used to stop people sharing information, who have no direct connection to the source of the information. You can't use the coercive power of the state to stop people spreading rumors, to stop people discussing political life, and sophisticated US jurisprudence understands that. And that is why you have things like the First Amendment, which takes the press outside the legislative process, because in the end it is the communication of knowledge which regulates the legislature, which creates the Constitution.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Julian Assange. He is holding a news conference, as we speak here, in London on the release of these 92,000 secret records from the Afghan war. They constitute something like 200,000 pages.

Daniel Ellsberg, before we go to break, I want to talk about this issue of secrecy and also what is happening to Julian Assange now. CNET reported that federal agents appeared at a hacker conference in New York recently, looking for Julian Assange. Our colleague, Eric Corley, publisher of *2600* magazine, organizer of the Next HOPE conference, said five Homeland Security agents appeared at the conference a day before the WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Julian Assange was scheduled to speak. They told him, if he shows up, he will be questioned at length. Before we go to Dan Ellsberg, maybe Stephen Grey can tell us more about this, having spent the weekend with Julian Assange, that he is very much on the run, that he is very much — says that he is being hunted.

STEPHEN GREY: Well, absolutely. He's aware of a great deal of surveillance, and I think he knows that it will all come down to politics, really. The US government would dearly love to arrest and question him, and they've certainly been trying, he says now. They've made a formal request to the Australian government to — this is what he says — to have him arrested, and the Australian government refused to comply. So I think he's resting — and he's noted surveillance people on the plane without luggage, joining him even in Iceland. So he thinks he's being followed wherever he goes, and he's relying on, if you like, the public support that might actually stop that sort of action, it would be counterproductive. And I think the US right now is trying to get somebody else to do it, because they know that if they themselves arrest Julian Assange, then it will create a huge backlash.

AMY GOODMAN: Daniel Ellsberg in Mexico?

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Well, some have said that it's ridiculous to think that Assange is in any actual danger. I don't know — physical danger. I don't know how large that probability is. It's probably small. But it should be zero, and it's not zero. It's ridiculous to say that it is zero that he's in any danger at all. The fact is that when I — they say, because he's so famous, because there's so much publicity on him, that he doesn't need to worry, from that point of view.

I speak from an unusual perspective there. In May 3rd, 1972, when I was on trial, in a major political trial with tremendous publicity on me, Richard Nixon, President Nixon, sent a dozen CIA assets up from Miami to Washington, where I was giving a — addressing a rally on the steps of the Capitol with a number of Congress persons there and a large crowd, with orders to incapacitate me totally. Those were the orders given to them. So I can hardly assure Assange that nothing like that could happen again.

We now have a president who has asserted — Barack Obama, who has asserted a right to do what other presidents have done in the past, but have done it covertly. He's asserting the right to assassinate American citizens abroad who he suspects, or intelligence suspects, are serving the cause of terrorism. And I'm sure, by the way, that the phrase "the most dangerous man alive," which Henry Kissinger put to me because of the disclosures I was making, that's the way they would think of Julian Assange right now. So he should be — he should be quite safe from that. But as your previous speakers have been saying, we're more and more conducting a war, and not only in Afghanistan, but it was earlier true in Iraq under General McChrystal, a war of death squads, of selective assassination. And those assassinations don't always, to broaden this point just a little bit here, those don't always hit the person who has been condemned to death on a hit list approved by the President. They don't always get — aside from the illegality of that whole process and the absolute denial of due process or of general laws of war, they don't hit the right people. They hit families. They hit other people when they're present.

The question is, I think — from this whole release, a question to be asked is this: when you look at this file, which ends in December, as the White House has pointed out, in December of last year, and they try to make the point that that shows that things are all different now, because now we're no longer under-resourcing it, we are now paying for, you know, a lot more death squads and a lot more drones and a lot of other things, and that will make all the difference. What I would like to see leaked — I don't know if it's in these documents or not — is the following bottom line. What was their estimate in December of the order of battle or the strength of all the various groups that we are fighting there in Afghanistan? After the \$300 billion that we've spent, how does that compare with a year earlier? And how does it compare with the estimate now? I would like to see a leak to Congress, in the first place, and to the public, of what their estimate is now in June, July of 2010, after we put more troops in there? Is it really smaller? I will make a strong guess that their official estimate, which we should know, of the Taliban forces in their various forms, all different kinds of them, that we're facing is larger now than it was six months ago and larger than it was a year ago. And I'll predict that after the next \$100 billion we've spent over there, it will be larger next year and the year after.

So this is the time, as I think Gareth Porter — no, as Matthew Hoh very well pointed out, for Congress, at last, to take on its responsibility of questioning whether we should be spending another \$300 billion and more on this process of trying to occupy a country that is successfully

— has successfully been fighting off foreigners for thousands of years. Actually, what I read in these documents is not just as Matthew was saying, that they're very similar to what he was seeing, as I heard him, in Afghanistan when he was there, they're pretty close to what I was reading, and in some cases writing, in Vietnam, when I was there forty, forty-five years ago. It really confirms what I've been saying for seven years, that we are involved in what I think of as Vietnamistan. And it's up to Congress right now, at last, not to defer to the President on this, not to give the benefit of the doubt to the people who have been keeping these reports secret from us for so long, but to investigate themselves and to take away that money.

AMY GOODMAN: Dan Ellsberg, we have to break. Daniel Ellsberg, Henry Kissinger called him "the most dangerous man in America." Rick Rowley with us, of Big Noise Films, just back from Afghanistan. Gareth Porter in Washington. Matthew Hoh, Marine Corps captain, the highest-level government official to quit over the Afghan war. Stephen Grey with us from London, he's just spent the weekend with Julian Assange and interviewed him for Channel 4.

Julian Assange just told reporters in his news conference it's up to a court to decide really if something in the end is a crime. That said, there does appear to be evidence of war crimes. He said what's been reported so far has only scratched the surface. We'll be back in a minute.

[break]

AMY GOODMAN: Our guest, whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, he released the Pentagon Papers. WikiLeaks is being compared to that. It's the largest release of secret documents in history. More than 92,000 records, that's more than 200,000 pages, have now been released online. Rick Rowley is with us, just back from Afghanistan, with Big Noise Films. Gareth Porter is with us in Washington, DC. Stephen Grey, in London, just interviewed Julian Assange for Channel 4. And Matthew Hoh, highest-level government official to quit his position in Afghanistan because of the war there, also a Marine Corps captain.

Matthew Hoh, I want to go to you. You worked with Task Force 373.

MATTHEW HOH: Loosely. It's a very integrated — with these special forces operations, I hope people aren't getting the idea that, at least of last year, they're off by themselves running amok. It's a fairly well-integrated operation that spans political efforts, as well. I'll give you an example. As a political officer, you would review the target lists to make sure you weren't — we weren't killing or going after anyone who was actually working with us. A lot of times what happens — the point was made that we kill the wrong people. Well, you know, sometimes we get the right guy, but he's actually just somebody who's been turned in by someone who's got a grudge against him.

One of the things I hope people see from these documents is how complex the nature of war is, how difficult war actually is. And so, the question has to be asked, Is it worth it? What we're asking our young men and women to do, is it worth putting them through this? And what benefit is it to the United States?

But the other point about the special operations raids, these capture-kill missions, if this worked, if this was a viable method, we would have won this thing back in '04 or '05, you know? And the other point, too, about Dan's — Dan Ellsberg's excellent point about the strength of the Taliban, I'm in complete agreement. If you actually go back and look at comments made by General Barno, who was the commanding general of American forces in '04 and '05, back then he was saying there were only 2,000 Taliban. Last summer they said it was 40,000. And I concur with Dan Ellsberg. We've sent 30,000 more troops into southern Afghanistan, and that probably has exponentially increased the strength of the Taliban, because we see the Taliban get their support because of resistance to foreign occupation and resistance to a corrupt and unrepresentative government.

AMY GOODMAN: Stephen Grey, the newspapers that WikiLeaks worked with in releasing this — and it's still all just being digested. It's less than twenty-four hours ago. By the way, Eric Schmitt, the reporter for the *New York Times*, said they've been working with the White House now for weeks and carefully going through and redacting names and other sources that might be compromised, said the White House was fully aware of what's in these documents. And he actually said Julian Assange has agreed to hold back a number of documents to go through that kind of redacting process before they're released. But Stephen Grey, *The Guardian* write, "In many cases, the unit has set out to seize" — talking about Task Force 373 — "seize targets for internment, but in others it has simply killed them without attempting to capture. The logs reveal that TF 373 has also killed civilian men, women and children and even Afghan police officers who have strayed into its path."

STEPHEN GREY: Well, that's right. And I've been looking through those same documents. I mean, they do show a lot of people are captured; it's not just a kill operation. But on the other hand, they are systematically using methods that don't allow you to capture. For example, there was one missile strike that they used to try and take out one person they were supposedly trying to capture, and, you know, it killed a bunch of children instead. And they tried to — you see them trying to prevent that information being released to anyone other than themselves. And it is quite shocking.

AMY GOODMAN: Let's go back to Gareth Porter in Washington, DC. Talk more about the significance, what you think is most important to highlight here, as we go through these hundreds of thousands of pages of top-secret documents, classified documents.

GARETH PORTER: Well, again, I mean, there are very few things here that have not, in some fashion, been reported by the news media over the last — particularly over the last year or so. But there is one set of documents, in particular, that I thought were particularly insightful in terms of revealing the basic nature of the society and of the Afghan government that the United States is supporting, and that is a set of documents that show, for example, a police commander, a district police commander, who had raped a sixteen-year-old girl and who was confronted with a civilian complaining about this rape. He ordered his bodyguard, according to this report, to shoot the civilian. The bodyguard refused to do so, and then the police commander simply killed his own bodyguard in order to basically deal with the situation. This sort of laid bare the basic structure that the United States has stumbled into, or, perhaps I should say, has allowed itself to

take control of, and — or tried to take control of, and I think what it shows is that this is a war that not only cannot be won, but in which the United States is on the wrong side.

And I just want to make one more point about the releases, and that is that I think that the real story here, the most important story, is WikiLeaks itself. I think what we have here is a new institution that is undoubtedly the most important antiwar institution that has been created so far and that I have no doubt is frightening the US military and intelligence establishment, as well as the Obama administration, very strongly. And I think that's for very good reason. I think they understand that this represents a potentially powerful weapon for the future against war crimes as well as other illegal actions by the United States.

AMY GOODMAN: I'm going to give, for the last few seconds, Daniel Ellsberg the last word, as we come full circle from Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers, that you had released at tremendous risk to yourself, to WikiLeaks right now and this unprecedented release of top-secret documents.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Well, this is the closest that I've come to what I've been calling for for years, and that is for people to do not what I did, which is to wait years, until bombs were falling and until more countries have been invaded or escalation, before revealing documents to Congress and the public through the press. And now, of course, we have a way of doing that, thanks to WikiLeaks, that does bypass the press, even if they are reluctant to do it. I've been very critical —

AMY GOODMAN: And we're —

DANIEL ELLSBERG: I've been very critical of the —

AMY GOODMAN: We're going to leave it there.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: OK.

AMY GOODMAN: We want to thank you very much, Daniel Ellsberg, for joining us. Thank you to Rick Rowley of Big Noise Films; Gareth Porter in Washington, DC; Stephen Grey in London, author of *Operation Snakebite*. And Matthew Hoh, thanks so much for joining us.