

The CIA's Strategy to Manipulate European Public Opinion on the Afghanistan War

Revelations of Leaked Document

By [Tom Burghardt](#)

Global Research, March 28, 2010

[Antifascist Calling...](#) 28 March 2010

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

Since their 2007 launch, the whistleblowing web site [WikiLeaks](#) have been the subject of **“hostile acts”** by state and private security services for spilling the beans on crime, corruption and violence perpetrated by the capitalist deep state.

But rather than being deterred by government **threats** or overt acts of violence, including the **murder** of two human rights attorneys in Nairobi last March, who provided the whistleblowers with reports on extrajudicial killings by Kenyan police, *WikiLeaks* have turned the tables on the CIA.

On March 26, the group published a remarkable **document** that lays out the Agency's strategy to manipulate European public opinion over waning support for the Afghanistan war.

Classified “Confidential/NOFORN” (No Foreign Nationals) the 11 March 2010 document is titled, “Afghanistan: Sustaining West European Support for the NATO-led Mission—Why Counting on Apathy Might Not Be Enough.”

Prepared by the CIA Red Cell, the entity is described in the text as an Agency subunit “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.”

According to *WikiLeaks* staff, “The proposed PR strategies focus on pressure points that have been identified within these countries. For France it is the sympathy of the public for Afghan refugees and women. For Germany it is the fear of the consequences of defeat (drugs, more refugees, terrorism) as well as for Germany's standing in the NATO. The memo is an recipe for the targeted manipulation of public opinion in two NATO ally countries, written by the CIA.”

Curiously, in an echo of capitalism's real and not imagined, living social content, the CIA evokes Guy Debord's [The Society of the Spectacle](#). After all, it was Debord who, commenting on the ability of contemporary societies to produce and reproduce a monstrous world “mediated by images,” first identified the media as a central locus for *managing* reality itself.

Langley's best and brightest now counsel America's political masters that although “apathy” may be their strongest ally in waging the endless “war on terror,” it cannot be counted upon

indefinitely to sustain the imperial project.

Contrast the CIA's evocation of "apathy" as a "warfighting" tool with Debord's insight that "the spectacle ... expresses nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep." One might add that the Agency's proposed media assault on Western public opinion is being prepared *precisely* to guarantee that the masses continue to slumber.

France and Germany: Heading Towards the Exits?

Last month's fall of the neoliberal Dutch government over their continued support for the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan was a wake-up call for Washington.

The news was greeted with dismay by partisans of the Afghan intervention and their media sycophants. [***The New York Times***](#) reported February 21, that when a "last-ditch effort" to keep Dutch troops in Afghanistan failed, it immediately raised "fears that the Western military coalition fighting the war was increasingly at risk."

As U.S. and British forces step-up operations across the entire "AfPak" theatre, launching murderous and indiscriminate drone strikes in Pakistan and "targeted killings" and massacres in Afghanistan, the spectre of a significant climb-down by the French and German governments set alarm bells ringing in the Pentagon.

The planned withdrawal by December of some 2,000 Dutch troops from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), would undoubtedly throw a spanner in the works. The Dutch are currently operating in the restive southern province of Oruzgan, north of the Taliban strongholds of Helmand and Kandahar provinces where major military operations are underway; their imminent departure will significantly alter NATO plans.

While the cover-story for stepped-up operations in Afghanistan by Washington is ostensibly to destroy the Afghan-Arab database of disposable Western intelligence assets known as al-Qaeda, and halt the avalanche of drugs from reaching Western consumers, this is, and always has been, a ludicrous fairy-tale.

As we know through countless investigations and exposés across the decades, from Vietnam through Watergate and from Iran-Contra to the endless "War on Terror," the international drugs trade is the handmaiden of Pentagon counterinsurgency campaigns, CIA operations and elite violence world-wide.

[***The New York Times***](#) reported March 21 that Afghanistan's lucrative opium crop is no longer a target of military operations. According to the *Times*, "the military's position is clear: 'U.S. forces no longer eradicate,' as one NATO official put it. Opium is the main livelihood of 60 to 70 percent of the farmers in Marja, which was seized from Taliban rebels in a major offensive last month. American Marines occupying the area are under orders to leave the farmers' fields alone."

But with the biggest players in Afghanistan's drug rackets linked to America's close allies in the corrupt Karzai government, the subtext is clear; as analysts Michel Chossudovsky and Peter Dale Scott have long argued, American interventions tend to *manage*, not eliminate, global drug flows, favoring narcotraffickers who play ball whilst targeting for destruction those who don't.

As Scott reported in January for [Global Research](#), none other than Antonio Maria Costa, the head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, claimed that “drugs money worth billions of dollars kept the financial system afloat at the height of the [2008] global crisis.” Indeed, Costa told [The Observer](#) last December that he has seen evidence that “the proceeds of organised crime were ‘the only liquid investment capital’ available to some banks on the brink of collapse last year.”

And as Chossudovsky [revealed](#) back in 2005, according to a U.S. Senate report “some \$500 billion to \$1 trillion in criminal proceeds are laundered through banks worldwide each year, with about half of that amount moved through United States banks.”

Above all else, the CIA’s strategy is meant to head-off any attempt by Europe’s citizens to corral their governments and force an end to their participation in U.S.-led efforts to recolonize Central- and South Asia.

One wag, Julian Lindley-French, a professor of defense strategy at the Netherlands Defense Academy in Breda told the *New York Times*, “If the Dutch go, which is the implication of all this, that could open the floodgates for other Europeans to say, ‘The Dutch are going, we can go, too’.”

Given these sentiments, the CIA and Pentagon will turn to “other means” to stop their NATO partners heading towards the exits.

A Cynical Media Operation

CIA media operations are fully consonant with the aims and methods employed by U.S. war planners; indeed, the manipulation of public opinion by battalions of public relations specialists, pollsters and former high-ranking military officers, often employed by giant defense and security corporations with “dogs in the hunt,” are part of the secret state’s army of “message force multipliers.”

That such operations have disastrous consequences for functioning democracies, not to mention the victims of NATO’s tender mercies, cannot be stressed often enough. To ensure that the bombs continue falling and Western control over access to vital Central Asian gas and petroleum reserves continue, public opinion, treated as an essential front of the imperial “battlespace,” must be “softened up.”

Accordingly, the CIA found that “Afghanistan mission’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). Berlin and Paris currently maintain the third and fourth highest ISAF troop levels, despite the opposition of 80 percent of German and French respondents to increased ISAF deployments, according to INR polling in fall 2009.”

State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) pollsters found:

- Only a fraction (0.1-1.3 percent) of French and German respondents identified “Afghanistan” as the most urgent issue facing their nation in an open-ended question, according to the same polling. These publics ranked “stabilizing Afghanistan” as among the lowest priorities for US and European leaders, according to polls by the German Marshall Fund (GMF) over the past two years.

- According to INR polling in the fall of 2009, the view that the Afghanistan mission is a waste of resources and “not our problem” was cited as the most common reason for opposing ISAF by German respondents and was the second most common reason by French respondents. But the “not our problem” sentiment also suggests that, so far, sending troops to Afghanistan is not yet on most voters’ radar. (CIA Red Cell, *Afghanistan: Sustaining West European Support for the NATO-led Mission—Why Counting on Apathy Might Not Be Enough*, 11 March 2010)

“If some forecasts of a bloody summer in Afghanistan come to pass,” CIA planners write, “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.”

This must be avoided at all costs. Cynically, CIA analysts conclude that “tailoring messaging could forestall or at least contain backlash.”

From the looks of things on the ground, the CIA will have much “tailoring” to do in order to stitch-up NATO’s fraying pretext for the Afghanistan intervention.

As an investigation by journalist Jerome Starkey revealed in [The Times](#) on March 13, “a night raid carried out by US and Afghan gunmen led to the deaths of two pregnant women, a teenage girl and two local officials in an atrocity which Nato then tried to cover up.”

According to Starkey, when details of the botched raid came to light, NATO officials claimed the force had found the women’s bodies “tied up, gagged and killed” in a room, implying the gruesome murders were the work of insurgents.

“A *Times* investigation” Starkey writes, “suggests that Nato’s claims are either wilfully false or, at best, misleading. More than a dozen survivors, officials, police chiefs and a religious leader interviewed at and around the scene of the attack maintain that the perpetrators were US and Afghan gunmen. The identity and status of the soldiers is unknown.”

As with the roll-out of any new product line, or moves to increase flagging interest in an existing commodity, niche consumers, French and German public opinion in the case of the Afghan intervention, are now subjects of a targeted marketing strategy by the CIA.

Accordingly, since INR surveys have found that the “French [are] focused on civilians and refugees,” CIA analysts aver that “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.” Indeed, “contradicting the ‘ISAF does more harm than good’ perception is clearly important, particularly for France’s Muslim minority.”

Such cynical constructs are all the more remarkable considering that “France’s Muslim minority” are cast by the French state, its far-right supporters and American secret warriors as a veritable “fifth column” to be closely surveilled and when necessary, repressed, lest an alleged “Islamist contagion” take root in the heart of Europe itself!

In this respect, “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.”

Never mind, that the warlord and Islamist/Mafia-backed coalition that comprises the Karzai government, as documented by innumerable human rights’ organizations and Afghan women themselves, such as ousted parliamentarian Malalai Joya, have found that the same brutal conditions persist for women today as under the retrograde U.S./Pakistan-backed Taliban regime of the 1990s.

For Germans however, xenophobic and nationalist cards will be played. “Messages that dramatize the consequences of a NATO defeat for specific German interests could counter the widely held perception that Afghanistan is not Germany’s problem. For example, messages that illustrate how a defeat in Afghanistan could heighten Germany’s exposure to terrorism, opium, and refugees might help to make the war more salient to skeptics.”

Additionally, CIA analysts stress that “emphasis on the mission’s multilateral and humanitarian aspects could help ease Germans’ concerns about waging any kind of war while appealing to their desire to support multilateral efforts. Despite their allergy to armed conflict, Germans were willing to break precedent and use force in the Balkans in the 1990s to show commitment to their NATO allies. German respondents cited helping their allies as one of the most compelling reasons for supporting ISAF, according to an INR poll in the fall of 2009.”

Considering that U.S./NATO allies jumped into the Balkans only when it became clear that German imperialism under the bankrupt government of Helmut Kohl, was intent on destroying the multicultural Yugoslav socialist state, and did so only not to be left in the dust by a resurgent unified German state with eyes clearly focused on lucrative East European markets, is a remarkable rewriting of history!

Another card which the CIA clearly intends to play is the alleged “confidence of the French and German publics in President Obama’s ability to handle foreign affairs in general and Afghanistan in particular.”

Indeed, appeals from America’s new *capo tutti capo* “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.” Such direct appeals from the global Godfather “might provide at least some leverage for sustaining contributions to ISAF.”

GMF polling data cited by the CIA 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.”

Another exploitable bullet point cited by the CIA are Afghan women. Accordingly, “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.”

However, as I pointed out above, only some “Afghan women” would be viewed as “ideal

messengers” in these media operations. Leftist, feminist or other internal critics of the Karzai Warlord-Mafia-Islamist regime would, by definition, be excluded from such forums. For the chosen few who pass muster, “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.”

Conclusion

The United States and their NATO allies are encountering stiff resistance in Afghanistan. In order to buttress political support from skeptical North American and European citizens, the CIA and their “friends” amongst the giant media conglomerates are pulling out all the stops.

The publication of the CIA’s analytical document by *Wikileaks*, provides the antiwar movement with insight into how imperialism intends to sell the wretched Afghan war to the public.

Counterstrategies that leverage this knowledge can potentially provide critics with ammunition that directly challenge American propaganda, disarm academic, media and political sycophants and more importantly, derail the policy of waging aggressive, “preemptive” wars well into the future.

Tom Burghardt is a researcher and activist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to publishing in Covert Action Quarterly and [Global Research](#), his articles can be read on [Dissident Voice](#), [The Intelligence Daily](#), [Pacific Free Press](#), [Uncommon Thought Journal](#), and the whistleblowing website [Wikileaks](#). He is the editor of Police State America: U.S. Military “Civil Disturbance” Planning, distributed by [AK Press](#).

The original source of this article is [Antifascist Calling...](#)

Copyright © [Tom Burghardt](#), [Antifascist Calling...](#), 2010

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Tom Burghardt](#)
<http://antifascist-calling.blogspot.com/>

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca