

# Before Wikileaks, Iraq War Vets Revealed War Crimes

By [Laila Al-Arian](#)

Global Research, October 24, 2010

[Huffingtonpost.com](#) 24 October 2010

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity,](#)  
[Intelligence](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

The massive leak of military documents from the Iraq war is making headlines around the world, even on a usually news-quiet Friday night – and for good reason. The reports reveal, among other things, that U.S. soldiers were given [orders not to investigate Iraqi torture](#), as Al Jazeera is reporting, based on documents from Wikileaks. Another revelation: At least 680 Iraqi civilians were killed and 2,000 others were wounded at U.S. military checkpoints in the last six years.

The leaked reports back up what Iraq war veterans have been telling journalists for years, only to be ignored by the mainstream media.

In the summer of 2006, journalist Chris Hedges and I began interviewing combat veterans who served in Iraq about their experiences there, focusing on civilian deaths – and they recounted stories, many in graphic detail, that are now corroborated by the military documents. In our piece for the Nation magazine, which was later expanded and published into a book called [“Collateral Damage: America’s War Against Iraqi Civilians,”](#) Hedges and I interviewed 50 soldiers and marines: the largest number of named eyewitnesses from within the U.S. military to have testified on the record about war crimes and atrocities in Iraq.

And the scenes they described were terrifying: convoys of dozens of vehicles roaring down Iraqi roads, jumping medians, smashing into civilian cars and hitting Iraqi civilians without stopping to survey the damage. They described how the mechanics of war – home raids, convoys, patrols, detentions, and military checkpoints – led to the daily abuse and killing of innocents. How the killing of civilians became routine, how rules of engagement changed all the time, and how there was a culture of impunity in the military when it came to noncombatant deaths. “Better to be tried by 12 than carried by six,” many said. Better, in short, to kill than be killed.

One disturbing story recounted by a soldier happened in Mosul in January 2005. An elderly couple zipped past a checkpoint, according to Sgt. Dustin Flatt. “The car was approaching what was in my opinion a very poorly marked checkpoint, or not even a checkpoint at all, and probably didn’t even see the soldiers,” he said. “The guys got spooked and decided it was a possible threat, so they shot up the car. And they literally sat in the car for the next three days while we drove by them day after day.” The townspeople eventually buried them, he said. Many of the troops told us these kinds of incidents were so common that they had long ceased to arouse much interest or comment.

The press coverage of the war in Iraq rarely exposed incidents like this, and when these vets returned to tell the stories, they were rarely listened to, especially by the mainstream U.S.

media. When our story was published in the Nation, no one from the MSM covered it, with the exception of a column by Bob Herbert in the New York Times. And when courageous soldiers and Marines testified about war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan at “Winter Soldier” in Silver Spring, Maryland in April 2008, they, too, were largely ignored. And it’s not just by the media. The politicians who cynically use “the troops” to garner support for their military expeditions no longer have use for them once they return.

But it’s difficult to ignore 400,000 leaked, classified military documents, which tell the same story these veterans tell, of a war in which the line between civilian and combatant is blurred, in which anyone and everyone is the enemy.

For too long the American people have been shielded from this narrative. The country has long lost interest in Iraq, which has now become “The Forgotten War.” But perhaps these leaked documents can spark a conversation that’s long overdue.

The original source of this article is [Huffingtonpost.com](http://Huffingtonpost.com)  
Copyright © [Laila Al-Arian](http://Laila Al-Arian), [Huffingtonpost.com](http://Huffingtonpost.com), 2010

---

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

**[Become a Member of Global Research](#)**

Articles by: [Laila Al-Arian](#)

**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](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://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](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)