[**War on leaks**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1748433/war-on-leaks)

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LAST month, Daniel Ellsberg, announced that he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and given just a few months to live. At 91, he decided against any treatment and said he would willingly enter hospice care whenever necessary. Coincidentally, a week or so earlier, the 98-year-old Jimmy Carter, one of the relatively less reprehensible former US presidents in recent decades, had made a similar announcement.

Unlike Carter, though, a half-century ago Ellsberg was designated “the most dangerous man in America” by none other than Henry Kissinger — who turns 100 next month but, as far as anyone knows, hasn’t contemplated entering a hospice. He has also avoided prosecution as a war criminal in the 50 years since his stint as national security adviser and secretary of state in the Nixon and Ford administrations.

His antipathy towards Ellsberg back in 1971 was triggered by the latter’s leaking of what became known as The Pentagon Papers. That collection of documents added up to a devastating critique of American aggression against Vietnam. It essentially revealed that the political and military elites had continued to pour resources, including young American flesh and blood, into the Indochinese quagmire despite knowing that the war was unwinnable.

The documents were not directly related to the incumbent Nixon administration, whose election had been facilitated by the Tricky Dicky campaign’s successful efforts to persuade the puppet government in Sai­gon to shun the Johnson administration’s pe­­ace initiative in 1968. The war went on for another seven years, expanding into Ca­­m­­bodia and exacerbating the conflict in Laos.

The latest Pentagon papers show a familiar trajectory.

Over the past decade or so, Ellsberg has been vociferously supportive of fellow whistleblowers, such as Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning and Reality Winner. I doubt whether he would count Jack Teixeira, the 21-year-old taken into custody last Thursday, as a member of the tribe. The Massachusetts air national guardsman apparently had little interest in stirring the pot.

Teixeira was merely trying to impress fellow members of the Thug Shaker Central war gaming social media group on the Discord platform. Although his access to the secret documents he posted online was legitimate, he must have known it wasn’t legal to share them. The available evidence suggests he is, at best, an inadvertent whistleblower.

The documents eventually found their way on to the wider internet, promptly followed by suggestions from both Kyiv and Moscow that they might be fake. US sources have hinted that some of the statistics might have been manipulated, but the broad thrust of the revelations seems genuine. What sets them apart from The Pentagon Papers and WikiLeaks’ Iraq War Files is the focus on current strategies and future plans rather than past deeds.

To a considerable extent, they tend to confirm suspicions rather than offer earth-shaking revelations. After all, anyone who has been following the news ought not to be particularly surprised to learn that Ukrainian air defences are less than solid, or that there are disputes within the Russian military hierarchy, or even that the US routinely spies on the governments of some of its closest allies — from Ukraine to South Korea and Israel.

A long time ago, one of the infamous Dulles brothers conceded that the United States had no friends — it only had interests. In contemporary terms, that could be translated as an acknowledgement that America prefers willing vassals over potentially fickle allies. Emmanuel Macron recently attracted considerable flak from his European neighbours for saying, following a visit to Beijing during which he avoided making a song and dance about the fate of Taiwan, that an alliance with the US did not make France a vassal state. Some of the more gung-ho commentators have singled out the French president as a 21st-century Neville Chamberlain, albeit without any criticism of his far more troubling neoliberal tendencies in the domestic sphere.

Future historians might have cause to cite the Teixeira leaks as a minor milestone in the decline and fall of the American empire, and some of the details in the documents are undoubtedly intriguing. None of this, however, should distract any attention from the campaign to liberate Assange, who has languished in Britain’s Belmarsh prison for four years because of an Ame­rican extradition attempt that could potentially lead to a 175-year prison term, effectively a death sentence. The WikiLeaks co-founder’s ‘crime’ is his role in exposing the inner workings of the American imperialist machine, in its own words.

Teixeira may not qualify as a member of the pantheon of worthy and well-intentioned whistleblowers, but his actions serve as a reminder that sometimes even stupidity can serve a useful purpose in laying bare the machinations of latter-day imperialism.

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