

# Accused WikiLeaks source Bradley Manning held in solitary confinement

Naomi Spencer  
18 December 2010

Army Private Bradley Manning, accused of leaking classified documents to WikiLeaks, has been held in solitary confinement by the military for more than seven months.

Manning, who has not been convicted of a crime, has been imprisoned since May at the Marine brig in Quantico, Virginia. Prior to that the 22-year-old intelligence specialist was held in a military prison in Kuwait, where he was also kept in solitary confinement.

Solitary confinement is widely acknowledged to be a form of torture. Severe isolation leads to psychological trauma, despair and mental illness. While routinely employed in the US prison system, the treatment is banned as a cruel and unusual punishment in many countries.

By all indications, the Obama administration and the military are subjecting Manning to this treatment in the hope that, after being incapacitated and made pliant, he will accept a plea deal in exchange for implicating WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange so that the US can prosecute the latter on conspiracy charges.

On Friday, the British *Independent* reported that the US Justice Department has offered Manning a plea bargain, which would involve him being transferred to civilian custody, in return for him naming Assange as an active collaborator in obtaining the leaked files.

Manning was detained after WikiLeaks released the “Collateral Murder” video last April. The video contains footage shot by a US attack helicopter of a massacre of civilians and journalists carried out in Baghdad in 2007. The Army private is accused of leaking hundreds of thousands of documents and other material that show the massive scale of civilian casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, expose corruption and lies, and document war crimes.

Statements purportedly made by Manning would indicate that he considered himself a whistleblower acting on behalf of the public. Manning was turned in by an informer, Adrian Lamo, a former computer hacker whom the soldier had contacted and reportedly told via online chats that he had leaked the helicopter video and was prepared to do the same with other material.

In chats later turned over to the FBI and published in edited form by *Wired* magazine, Manning allegedly said he wanted to see “hopefully worldwide discussion, debates and reforms” as a result of the revelations. “If not, then we’re doomed—as a species. I will officially give up on the society we have if nothing happens.”

Despite having an exemplary record of conduct with no threatening or violent behavior, Manning is classified as a “maximum custody detainee,” the highest level of military detention. On this basis, he has been subjected to extremely repressive conditions.

Details of his confinement make clear he is being punished as a political prisoner. Isolated in a small cell for 23 hours a day, and under surveillance, he is forbidden from exercising in his cell and has been denied even a pillow or sheets.

A December 14 report by Glenn Greenwald for *Salon* notes that during the single hour a day when he is allowed out of his cell, he is not permitted access to news updates or current events programming. Manning is also prohibited contact with reporters.

Friends and supporters have said that Manning’s mental state is deteriorating as a result of the inhumane conditions. He has been put on anti-depressants by the prison medical staff.

David House, a personal friend who has visited Manning every two weeks over the past several months and worked to build a legal defense network, described

marked changes in Manning's behavior and physical appearance. Speaking to the *Guardian* December 16, House explained, "Over the last few weeks I have noticed a steady decline in his mental and physical wellbeing. His prolonged confinement in a solitary holding cell is unquestionably taking its toll on his intellect; his inability to exercise due to [prison] regulations has affected his physical appearance in a manner that suggests physical weakness."

House said many who were close to Manning were reluctant to talk to the media about his condition because of the threat of government surveillance and harassment. On November 3, House was detained and searched by Homeland Security agents at an airport. The agents seized all of his electronic items and demanded his personal passwords and encryption keys.

"This has had such an intimidating effect that many are afraid to speak out on his behalf," House said. He added, "If Manning is convicted, it will be because his individual dedication to human ethics far surpasses that of the US government."

On Thursday, hundreds of anti-war protestors gathered for a rally in defense of Manning and Assange in front of the White House. Dozens of protesters were arrested for disobeying police orders to clear the public sidewalk, among them Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg.

Ellsberg called the actions of Manning and Assange "exactly the right thing to do" and "a very admirable act." He added, "I think they provided a very valuable service. To call them terrorists is not only mistaken, it's absurd."



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**