

Stop US torture of Bradley Manning!

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Thirty miles from downtown Washington DC, the US military is engaged in the torture of an American citizen. Army Private Bradley Manning, jailed on suspicion of leaking classified documents to the whistleblower web site WikiLeaks, is being held at the Quantico Marine Corps base under conditions that approximate those at Guantanamo Bay.

Manning has been in solitary confinement for more than seven months. He is confined to his cell 23 hours a day, allowed out for one hour of solitary exercise—he is not allowed to exercise in his cell, and guards intervene if he attempts to do so. His pillow and bedding are removed during the day to prevent him from sleeping, and under the “prevention of injury” [POI] regime imposed on him throughout his imprisonment, jailers look in on him every five minutes and require him to make an affirmative response that he is “OK.”

The 23-year-old soldier is allowed only one book or magazine at a time, and may use his prescription glasses only when he is actually reading. The rest of the time he goes without them, and is “effectively blind,” he told visitors.

In some ways, the conditions in which Manning is held are worse than those in Guantanamo, or in a maximum security US prison, because solitary confinement is used largely as a disciplinary measure, or to protect those who may be at risk from other prisoners. There is no legal precedent for the indefinite solitary confinement of a prisoner who is awaiting trial, has not been convicted of any offense, and has no history of violence.

On Monday, Amnesty International issued a statement criticizing the “inhumane treatment” of Manning. Reports of the abusive conditions in which he is held have now begun to appear in the US corporate media. ABC correspondent Jake Tapper asked White House press secretary Robert Gibbs Monday whether the conditions of Manning’s imprisonment were “appropriate.” Gibbs would only refer him to the authorities at Quantico.

NBC News reported the same day that US military officials were denying charges that Manning was being

tortured or held in solitary confinement without due process—the first time that NBC or any other US television network has made reference to the controversy over Manning’s treatment in prison.

The military admitted to NBC that Brig Commander James Averhart “did violate procedure when he placed Manning on ‘suicide watch’ last week.” Only professional medical personnel can put a prisoner on suicide watch, and then only after a psychiatric examination. Suicide watch involves around-the-clock confinement to the cell, stripping the prisoner of all clothing except underwear, and confiscation of the prisoner’s glasses (supposedly for his own protection).

The methods employed against Bradley Manning are sadistic and punitive, and widely condemned by human rights organizations when carried out by dictatorial governments. There is every reason to believe that he is being subjected to prolonged solitary confinement, as well as enforced idleness and sleep deprivation, in order to break him psychologically and induce him to provide testimony against WikiLeaks.

The same NBC News broadcast Monday reported that US officials had been unable to establish any direct link between Manning and Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks. This confirms the account given by Assange, who says that he first heard Manning’s name in media reports after his arrest. WikiLeaks has established security procedures that ensure that those who provide leaked documents to the web site remain anonymous, not only to the government, but to WikiLeaks itself.

A letter from Amnesty International to Defense Secretary Robert Gates suggests that the treatment of Manning violates “the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (SMR), which are internationally recognized guiding principles.” The letter also voices concern over the Kafkaesque refusal of the military to justify the conditions under which Manning is held or to respond to his lawyers. The letter continues:

“We are concerned that no formal reasons have been provided to PFC Manning for either his maximum

security classification or the POI assignment and that efforts by his counsel to challenge these assignments through administrative procedures have thus far failed to elicit a response. We are further concerned that he reportedly remains under POI despite a recommendation by the military psychiatrist overseeing his treatment that such an assignment is no longer necessary.”

To dispense with such restrained and legalistic language, and put things bluntly, Private Bradley Manning is being tortured by the US military. The Obama administration, having come into office with a promise to end the torture carried out by the Bush administration, is engaged in similar practices itself. This is taking place, not only in secret CIA and military prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan, not only in Guantanamo Bay, but in the Virginia suburbs of Washington DC.

Throughout the buildup of the repressive powers of the American government under the pretext of the “war on terror,” the WSWS has warned that measures employed against supposed terrorists would inevitably be used against the population of the United States. The abusive treatment of Bradley Manning proves the correctness of this warning.

If Private Manning did contribute to the WikiLeaks exposures, he deserves the thanks of the American people, and the people of the entire planet, for bringing to light documents that reveal the war crimes and diplomatic conspiracies being carried out by the US government. The international working class must demand a halt to the physical and psychological abuse of Bradley Manning, and his immediate release from prison.



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