

Private Bradley Manning held naked at military brig

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Private First Class Bradley Manning, suspected by the United States Army of being WikiLeaks' source for thousands of classified military reports and diplomatic cables, was stripped naked in his cell Wednesday and Thursday nights.

This degrading treatment at the brig at the Marine base in Quantico, Virginia came alongside notification March 3 by the Army that Manning was facing 22 additional charges, including a charge of "aiding the enemy," which carries the death penalty. (See "US Army charges accused WikiLeaks source Private Bradley Manning with capital offense")

According to Manning's lawyer, David E. Coombs, Manning, 23, was inexplicably stripped of his clothing on the night of March 2 and then forced to remain naked in his cell for the next seven hours. Coombs wrote in his March 3 blog, "At 5:00 a.m., the Brig sounded the wake-up call for the detainees. At this point, PFC Manning was forced to stand naked at the front of his cell."

Shortly after 5:00 a.m., the duty brig supervisor arrived and walked through the facility to conduct a prisoner count. Following this, Manning was told to sit on his bed, and about 10 minutes later a guard came to his cell and returned his clothing. The young private was told the same thing would happen the following night.

According to Coombs' March 4 blog, the same treatment was meted out the night of March 3. The decision to strip Manning of his clothing was made by the brig commander, Chief Warrant Officer-2 Denise Barnes. Coombs writes that according to a Marine

spokesman, "the decision was 'not punitive' and done in accordance with Brig rules."

Coombs notes: "There can be no conceivable justification for requiring a soldier to surrender all his clothing, remain naked in his cell for seven hours, and then stand at attention the subsequent morning. This treatment is even more degrading considering that PFC Manning is being monitored—both by direct observation and by video—at all times." Brig officials informed Manning's defense that the decision to strip Manning and have him remain naked overnight was made without consulting the brig's mental health providers.

This debased treatment constitutes an escalation of the torture to which Manning has been subjected in his 10 months of solitary confinement at the brig. He has been convicted of no crime, but has earned the wrath of US military and government authorities for allegedly aiding WikiLeaks' exposure of US atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan and other imperialist crimes and conspiracies around the world.

While not displaying any suicidal tendencies, and against the advice of military psychiatrists, Manning is being held under a prevention of injury order (POI). Confined to his cell 23 hours a day, he is allowed out for only one hour of exercise a day in an empty room where he can walk but is forbidden to run. He is not permitted to sleep during the day, and is severely restricted in the use of his eyeglasses and reading material.

In an appearance on the MSNBC cable television channel Thursday, Pentagon Press Secretary Geoffrey Morrell attributed the conditions of Manning's

imprisonment to “the seriousness of the charges he’s facing, the potential length of sentence, the national security implications and also the potential harm... that he could do to himself or from others,” adding that the brutal treatment was “for his [PFC Manning’s] own good.”

Manning’s friend, David House, a researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and one of the few people to have visited him in prison, spoke Thursday of seeing Manning go from a “bright-eyed intelligent young man” to someone who appeared “catatonic” at times, with “very high difficulty carrying on day-to-day conversation.”

“For me this has been like watching a really good friend succumb to an illness or something,” House said, “I think that Bradley Manning is being punished this way because the US government wants him to crack ahead of his trial.”

The most serious of the new charges brought Wednesday in Manning’s court martial process is the charge brought under Article 104 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice of “aiding the enemy” by supplying information “either directly or indirectly.” By not specifying the identity of the alleged “enemy,” the Pentagon leaves open the possibility that this could refer to WikiLeaks and individuals like the whistleblower web site’s founder, Julian Assange, who as the enemy could be targeted for military action.

The military has stated that Assange and WikiLeaks are not the unnamed enemy. “It’s not WikiLeaks, OK?” said Shaunteh Kelly, chief of media relations for the US Army Military District of Washington. She added, “Given that this is a national security case during a time of war, identifying this information may potentially compromise ongoing military operations.”

On Thursday, the military said that the word “enemy” in the charge against Manning referred to any hostile forces that could benefit from learning about classified military tactics. If such a catch-all definition of “aiding the enemy” were applied to civilians, it could be used to prosecute any media outlet or Internet site that published classified military-related material leaked by

a whistleblower.

The escalation of the torturous treatment of Manning, coming on the heels of the new charges laid against him, is likely aimed at getting Manning to provide information implicating Assange and WikiLeaks. More broadly, the military and the Obama administration are seeking to make an example of Manning so as to intimidate others from exposing the crimes of US imperialism.

Although military prosecutors have said they are not seeking the death penalty, the decision is ultimately up to Maj. Gen. Karl R. Horst, the Military District of Washington commander, who could refer the “aiding the enemy” charge as a capital offense.

Final charges in Manning’s case are expected in late May or early June at a provisional hearing in the court-martial process.



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