

Military ramps up torture of alleged WikiLeaks source

Private Bradley Manning forced to sleep naked

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The US military and the Obama administration have escalated their sadistic abuse of alleged WikiLeaks source Private First Class Bradley Manning. Since last Wednesday, when the Army informed Manning that it was filing an additional 22 charges against him, including the capital offense of “aiding the enemy,” his jailers at the Quantico, Virginia Marine brig have forced him to sleep without any clothing and line up naked in front of his cell every morning at 5 a.m.

This treatment, which Manning’s lawyer has denounced as arbitrary and punitive, is to continue indefinitely. It can only be seen as a further effort to break the 23-year-old soldier, who is facing court martial and a possible death sentence for allegedly downloading and sharing computer files of more than 250,000 confidential State Department cables, a classified video of a US helicopter attack on civilians in Baghdad, and thousands of Iraq and Afghanistan war logs.

The government claims that Manning was the source for the documents that have been released by the whistleblower web site WikiLeaks. Manning’s alleged “crime” is helping expose war crimes and diplomatic provocations and conspiracies by the United States government. He is being persecuted and tortured for courageously opposing the real criminals who are responsible for death and destruction on a massive scale—a course of action sanctioned under the principles laid down by the Nuremburg Tribunal.

Manning was arrested last May in Iraq, held first in Kuwait and then brought to Quantico at the end of July. Since then—for more than seven months—he has been held in maximum custody while awaiting trial and placed on “prevention of injury watch” (POI), a

designation that condemns him to isolation 23 hours a day in his cell, with only one hour of solitary exercise. He is under continuous surveillance, both by video and directly by his jailers, and restricted in his use of his glasses and his access to reading material.

He has been subjected to this cruel regimen despite the judgment of the prison psychiatrist that he is not mentally disturbed and poses no threat to himself or others.

Since last Wednesday, the military has increased the level of abuse and degradation. Manning’s lawyer, David Coombs, posted a report on his blog March 5 outlining the treatment of his client.

“The brig has stripped PFC Manning,” he wrote, “of all his clothing for the past three nights, and they intend to continue this practice indefinitely. Each night, brig guards force PFC Manning to relinquish all of his clothing. He then lies in a cold jail cell naked until the following morning, when he is required to endure the humiliation of standing naked at attention for the morning roll call. According to Marine spokesperson, First Lieutenant Brian Villard, the decision to strip him naked every night is for PFC Manning’s own protection.”

Coombs went on to explain that the new abuse was prompted by Manning’s response to being told last Wednesday that his Article 138 complaint requesting that he be removed from maximum custody and prevention of injury watch had been denied by the Quantico commander. Manning asked what he could do to be downgraded from maximum custody and POI and was told there was nothing he could do because he was deemed by prison authorities to be at risk of self-harm.

Coombs explained: “PFC Manning then remarked

that the POI restrictions were ‘absurd’ and sarcastically stated that if he wanted to harm himself, he could conceivably do so with the elastic waistband of his underwear or with his flip-flops.”

Coombs continued: “Without consulting any brig mental health provider, Chief Warrant Officer Denise Barnes used Manning’s sarcastic quip as justification to increase the restrictions imposed upon him under the guise of being concerned that PFC Manning was a suicide risk. PFC Manning was not, however, placed under the designation of Suicide Risk Watch. This is because Suicide Risk Watch would have required a brig mental health provider’s recommendation, which the brig commander did not have. In response to this specific incident, the brig psychiatrist assessed PFC Manning as ‘low risk and requiring only routine outpatient follow-up [with] no need for...closer clinical observation...

“Given these circumstances, the decision to strip PFC Manning of his clothing every night for an indefinite period of time is clearly punitive in nature. There is no mental health justification for the decision... The brig’s treatment of PFC Manning is shameful. It is made even more so by the brig hiding behind concerns for ‘[PFC] Manning’s privacy.’ There is no justification, and there can be no justification, for treating a detainee in this degrading and humiliating manner.”

The Obama administration is persecuting and torturing Manning for two major reasons. First, to force him to implicate WikiLeaks and its co-founder, Julian Assange, in his alleged downloading of classified documents. The government, in its campaign to destroy WikiLeaks and punish Assange, needs such testimony from Manning to potentially extradite and prosecute Assange under US sedition laws.

More broadly, the US government wants to make an example of Manning in order to intimidate others who might leak classified material relating to US war crimes and to create a precedent for prosecuting media organizations that published such material.



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