

Obama defends abuse of Private Bradley Manning

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An otherwise desultory press conference Friday morning featured the first public questioning of President Obama about the abusive treatment of Bradley Manning, the Army private who faces 34 criminal charges, some bearing the death penalty, for allegedly leaking to WikiLeaks evidence of US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as State Department cables revealing US diplomatic intrigues.

Manning is jailed at the Quantico Marine Corps base near Washington DC, under conditions that have been denounced by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations as tantamount to torture. He has been held in solitary confinement there for more than seven months. In the last week he has been deprived of all clothing during sleeping hours, then compelled to stand naked for inspection every morning.

If another country were meting out similarly sadistic treatment to a captured American POW, the Pentagon and the American media would be howling about war crimes. But Manning's treatment has been largely blacked out of the corporate-controlled mass media. Friday's question was the first time the subject has been raised by the White House press corps.

The inquiry by Jake Tapper of ABC News was the second and subordinate part of a question that began with the Japanese earthquake and its effect on Japanese nuclear power facilities. Tapper then continued as follows:

"And then, a second question--the State Department spokesman, PJ Crowley, said the treatment of Bradley Manning by the Pentagon is ridiculous and counterproductive and stupid. And I'm wondering if you agree with that. Thank you, sir."

Obama answered the question about Japan, then added:

"With respect to Private Manning, I have actually

asked the Pentagon whether or not the procedures that have been taken in terms of his confinement are appropriate and are meeting our basic standards. They assure me that they are. I can't go into details about some of their concerns, but some of this has to do with Private Manning's safety as well."

This answer is a cowardly example of stonewalling, undoubtedly crafted in advance after consultation with the Pentagon brass. Obama does not actually say that Manning is being treated appropriately, only that unnamed military officials "assure me that they are."

He then wraps the whole issue in secrecy, with the suggestion that Manning is somehow being protected from himself rather than subjected to sadistic abuse in order to break him psychologically and pressure him into becoming a government witness against WikiLeaks.

Able to follow up, Tapper went for the most trivial aspect of the issue, asking, "Do you disagree with PJ Crowley?" Obama responded, "I think I gave you an answer to the substantive issue."

No other reporter sought to follow up the subject.

Crowley, having served as chief spokesman for the National Security Council during the Clinton administration before working for Hillary Clinton in the current administration, is a veteran apologist for the crimes of US imperialism, including the Kosovo War and the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

At a public discussion Thursday at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, before an audience of 20 people, Crowley was asked about the treatment of Manning, which the questioner described as the military "torturing a prisoner in a military brig."

A career Air Force officer before he became a government spokesman, Crowley replied, "What's being done to Bradley Manning by my colleagues at the

Department of Defense is ridiculous and counterproductive and stupid.” He went on, however, to defend Manning’s incarceration and condemn the WikiLeaks revelations.

Obama’s endorsement of the torture of Manning follows his order Monday to resume the drum-head military tribunals at Guantanamo and hold 48 of the 172 remaining detainees under indefinite detention without any form of legal process. He is, no less than his predecessor, an accomplice in the sadistic abuse and torture of prisoners both at Guantanamo and on the US mainland.



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