

Presiding officer calls for Bradley Manning to face court-martial

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The US Army announced Thursday that the presiding officer in last month's pretrial hearing for Private Bradley Manning, the US soldier charged with handing over thousands of classified documents to whistleblower site WikiLeaks, has recommended that Manning face a full court-martial. Col. Paul Almanza wrote to his superiors calling for all 22 charges against Manning to be referred for trial.

According to the US Army Military District of Washington, "the investigating officer concluded that the charges and specifications are in the proper form and that reasonable grounds exist to believe that the accused committed the offenses alleged."

Manning faces a possible death sentence for the charge of "aiding the enemy," or life imprisonment for all the 22 charges under the Espionage Act lodged against him. Manning is alleged to have funneled to WikiLeaks material, subsequently published by the web site, documenting war crimes by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as other actions by Washington directed against the democratic rights and social conditions of working people in countries around the world.

Almanza's ruling was submitted to Col. Carl Coffman, a base commander, who can either make the decision to proceed to a court-martial or pass the matter further up the chain of command to Maj. Gen. Michael Linnington, a Washington commander, to make the final decision. In either case, it is almost certain that Manning will face a military trial, likely to be held within the next three to four months.

Since his arrest, the 24-year-old intelligence analyst has been subjected to eighteen months of inhumane conditions of confinement, mostly at the Quantico, Virginia Marine Corps base. Solitary confinement, sensory and sleep deprivation and forced nudity have

been inflicted on the young private.

Amnesty International (AI) issued a statement one year ago declaring, "We are concerned that the conditions inflicted on Bradley Manning are unnecessarily severe and amount to inhumane treatment by the US authorities."

AI continued: "Manning has not been convicted of any offence, but military authorities appear to be using all available means to punish him while in detention. This undermines the United States commitment to the principle of the presumption of innocence."

Manning's treatment was aimed at breaking his will and compelling him to assist the US government in its vendetta against WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange who is currently awaiting a British Supreme Court ruling on an extradition request by the Swedish government based on trumped-up sex charges. If Assange is extradited to Sweden, it is expected that the US government will seek to have him sent to the United States to face charges of aiding terrorists.

Alternately, under the police state provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act signed into law by President Obama last month, Assange could be ordered by the White House to be seized by the military and held for life without being charged or having a trial.

In the seven-day Article 32 hearing held last month at Fort Meade, Maryland, Manning's civilian defense attorney David Coombs moved that Almanza recuse himself from the case. Coombs argued that Almanza had served in the US Department of Justice, preparing the case against Assange, and therefore his role as investigating officer in the Manning hearing represented a conflict of interest.

Manning's arrest by the military in May of 2010 followed the April publication by WikiLeaks of a damning video of a helicopter massacre of Iraqi

citizens, including two Reuters journalists, which occurred in July 2007. Reuters had requested a copy of the video under the Freedom of Information Act and had been blocked by military authorities. The video currently has over 12 million views on YouTube.

Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the “Pentagon Papers” to the media over 40 years ago, has been outspoken in his defense of Manning and whistleblowers in general. In an interview on the Keith Olbermann television show, “Current,” Ellsberg asserted that “Obama practically has a war going against whistleblowers” and that as commander-in-chief, Obama has “contaminated” Manning’s case by giving him “verdict first, trial later.”

Ellsberg said of Obama, “He said he [Manning] had broken the law before even the prosecution case had been heard, let alone the defense case. He said he was guilty. That alone is virtually a directed verdict—unlawful command influence on the subordinate officers who will be carrying out this decision and later in the trial. This court-martial should be thrown out for that reason alone.”



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