

Bradley Manning pleads not guilty to “aiding the enemy” charge

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In a statement in military court Thursday, Army Private Bradley Manning pleaded not guilty to “aiding the enemy,” the most serious of 22 charges against him for his part in allegedly leaking classified documents to whistleblower organization WikiLeaks. Through his lawyer, David Coombs, Manning offered guilty pleas to 10 of the charges related to disclosing evidence of war crimes.

Reading from a 35-page statement written and typed by Manning, the young soldier admitted that he leaked government files out of a desire to “spark a domestic debate on the role of our military and foreign policy in general.” The admissions are a naked plea, meaning that the defense has made no prior plea agreement with the prosecution to limit the sentence. Colonel Denise Lind, the Army judge presiding in the hearings, ordered that Manning erase his signature from the statement so that it could not be considered a sworn document.

The testimony was only the second time Manning has spoken during his pre-trial hearings at the Fort Meade Army base in Maryland. The charges to which he pleaded guilty are lesser offenses, and the government has said the admissions will have no impact on the prosecution’s case. By entering the pleas, Manning cannot be found “not guilty” by the judge at trial. Lind had previously ruled that Manning’s personal motives were irrelevant, a decision that strips the soldier of any whistleblower protections.

Among the leaked material attributed to Manning’s activities are video evidence of war crimes committed by US forces in Iraq, high Afghan civilian casualty figures and US atrocities not admitted by the Pentagon, and diplomatic double-dealing on the part of the State Department. The 25-year-old former intelligence analyst faces a full court martial, tentatively set for June, and the possibility of life in military prison if

convicted under the Espionage Act. The Obama administration intends to make an example out of Manning to other would-be opponents and to use his case as a springboard in the pursuit of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Manning related to the court Thursday that after finding the video of a US helicopter gunning down innocent civilians including children and journalists in Iraq—later published by WikiLeaks under the title “Collateral Murder”—he contacted multiple media outlets to pass them the files. Politico.com, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times* were among the organizations Manning approached before he turned to WikiLeaks.

Like the vast majority of documents and testimony in the hearings, Manning’s statement has not been made public. Media present in the courtroom are not allowed to use electronic devices except to issue brief Twitter and blog updates during recesses.

“I wanted the American public to know that not everyone in Iraq and Afghanistan was a target that needed to be engaged and neutralized,” Manning said, according to a Twitter update by British *Telegraph* reporter Raf Sanchez.

Ed Pilkington of the British *Guardian* reported that Manning contacted the *Washington Post* in January 2010 and “asked would it be interested in receiving information that he said would be ‘enormously important to the American people.’ He spoke to a woman who said she was a reporter but ‘she didn’t seem to take me seriously.’”

Nathan Fuller of the Bradley Manning Support Network tweeted that Manning explained about the war logs released to WikiLeaks: “I believed and still believe these are some of the most important documents of our time.”

“No one associated with WikiLeaks pressured me into sending more information,” Manning stated [as reported by Kevin Gosztola of *Firedoglake.com*].

“The most alarming part to me was the seemingly delightful bloodlust” exhibited by soldiers in the helicopter gunship attack, who “seemed to not value human life by referring to them as ‘dead bastards’... I was disturbed by the response to injured children” [Fuller’s account].

Pilkington quoted Manning as expressing the desire to reveal to the American people the “true costs of war.”

“I felt we were risking so much for people who seemed to be unwilling to cooperate with us, leading to frustration and hostility on both sides. I began to get depressed about the situation we were mired in year after year,” Manning said.

“We were obsessed with capturing and killing human targets on lists and ignoring goals and missions. I believed if the public, particularly the American public, could see this it could spark a debate on the military and our foreign policy in general as it applied to Iraq and Afghanistan. It might cause society to reconsider the need to engage in counter-terrorism while ignoring the human situation of the people we engaged with every day.”

As Manning’s pre-trial detention passed 1,000 days this week, Lind ruled Tuesday that his right to a speedy trial was not violated. The more than three years of prison, including time spent in solitary confinement, was “reasonable” in light of the gravity of the charges, the judge declared. Military rules mandate an accused soldier be arraigned within four months of arrest.

On Wednesday, prosecutors for the Obama administration announced plans to call 141 witnesses, including 15 people who will testify that the information acquired by WikiLeaks caused harm to US “national interests,” a term so nebulous as to include almost anything the government deems it to be.

Lead government prosecutor Ashden Fein said that four witnesses would testify entirely anonymously and in secret, with only the judge, lawyers and Manning present. One of those witnesses would be a member of the Navy Seal kill team involved in the extra-judicial assassination of Osama Bin Laden. During the Abbottabad raid, the Obama administration claims, their “John Doe” entered Bin Laden’s compound and

found digital media devices containing four files of WikiLeaks content. “This information was requested by Osama Bin Laden; a member of al-Qaeda went and got the information and gave it to Bin Laden,” Fein stated.

Thirty-three other witnesses the government plans to call will also give testimony at least partially in secret. Fein claimed that those witnesses would describe “injury and death to individuals” and how “capability of the enemy increased in certain countries,” allegedly as a result of the WikiLeaks publications.

The Obama administration’s official assessments, including the results of the so-called WikiLeaks Taskforce, found no evidence of harm to US personnel as a consequence of the leaks. Manning’s defense counsel has been denied the ability to call witnesses from the military and government whose testimony would be likely to contradict the arguments of the prosecution.



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