

US government charges Manning with “aiding the enemy” in court martial

Naomi Spencer
5 June 2013

The ongoing Army court martial of Private Bradley Manning is a crude political frame-up. The Obama administration is prosecuting the 25-year-old Army private on 20 charges under the Espionage Act for exposing war crimes carried out by the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The charge of “aiding the enemy” is the most sinister. The Obama administration has claimed Manning knew Al Qaeda and other “enemies” of the US would benefit from information he is accused of leaking to WikiLeaks, and could use it to cause harm to American “interests.” Manning has pled not guilty to the charge and 11 others related to it. Nothing in what Manning has said in the more than 1,100 days of his detention, nor any of the evidence seized from him, indicates he sympathizes with the Sunni fundamentalist terrorist organization. By all rights, Manning’s attorneys could turn the tables on the Obama administration, which has a real record of aiding Al Qaeda and its affiliates for its proxy wars in Libya and now Syria.

Manning has repeatedly expressed his motive was to expose to the American public the crimes being committed in its name, and “spark a domestic debate on the role of our military and foreign policy in general.” In other words, he is facing the full weight of the state for exercising his freedom of speech and telling the American people the truth. The charge of “aiding the enemy” only underscores the fact the government increasingly sees the US population, which has increasingly turned against the wars, as a potential enemy to American imperialist “interests.”

Ben Wizner, an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer present at the Manning court martial, commented to the *New York Times* on the “striking” emphasis on “the ‘enemy’ as the audience for the leaks.” Pointing to the Abu Ghraib torture photographs, which sparked outrage at the Bush administration in 2004, Wizner observed,

“Sometimes what may be helpful to the enemy is also indispensable to the public in a functioning democracy.”

The military judge in the case, Colonel Denise Lind, ruled in April that “enemy,” may refer to “any hostile body such as a rebellious mob or a band of renegades.” The definition is so broad as to identify as enemies of the US not only terrorist organizations, but also crowds of protesters such as those who took to the streets in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, partially motivated by the corruption exposed by WikiLeaks. Logically, this definition could encompass anti-war opponents in the US itself.

The American media has largely parroted the government’s charges and sought to create a witch-hunt atmosphere against Manning. The headlines blare the words “traitor,” “aiding the enemy,” and “espionage”: “Bradley Manning Trial Begins; Prosecutor Says Leaker Gave Vital Info to Enemies” (ABC News); “Whistleblowing here or helping the enemy?”; “Bradley Manning ‘craved’ notoriety” (CNN).

NBC News was particularly blatant. “The court martial of the man who may have put military secrets in the hands of Osama bin Laden started today, the so-called WikiLeaks trial,” NBC Nightly News anchor Brian Williams announced Monday night. “Prosecutors said Manning harvested hundreds of thousands of documents from secret databases and put them on the web and into the hands of the enemy, including the names of every American serving in Iraq—74,000 individuals in uniform. He said some of the information was later found during the raid that killed bin Laden.”

After more than a decade of war, public sentiment in the US is increasingly hostile to the foreign policy aims of American imperialism. The Obama administration, which has built on the illegal policies of the Bush era, is in the midst of a crisis over its crimes. Drone assassination, domestic spying and torture of detainees at Guantanamo continue, and the White House is moving closer to open

military action in Syria, a move that could trigger a catastrophic regional war. The political persecution of Manning is aimed at intimidating and silencing political dissent and opposition. Since taking office in 2009, Obama has overseen the prosecution of six so-called whistleblowers, more than all other administrations in US history combined, and is currently cracking down on news reporters.

The proceedings against Manning are a travesty of justice. Government lawyers have cobbled together a case that relies on reams of classified material, two-dozen anonymous witnesses, secret testimony and coded language. The prosecution anticipates that of its 141 witnesses, half will testify behind closed doors. On Monday, the prosecution opened the court martial with an hour-long slideshow presentation. In it, lead prosecutor Captain Joe Morrow purported to show chat logs between Manning and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, which he said showed a “familiarity” between the two. Morrow claimed that Assange was directing Manning in searching through military databases while the young intelligence analyst was stationed in Baghdad.

WikiLeaks has never admitted or denied that Manning was the source of material transmitted onto their servers. Indeed, the whistleblower organization is structured in such a way that it is impossible for staff members to discover the identity of its sources. Manning maintains his innocence on the allegation of the personal information leak and entered a not guilty plea in relation to it.

As day two of the trial got underway at Fort Meade, Maryland Tuesday morning, journalists were warned that they and their social media accounts would be monitored by federal authorities. Manning supporters noted that on Monday, 70 journalists turned out to cover the trial; on Tuesday there were only 25. Many were crowded into a trailer to watch a remote video feed of the courtroom. Manning supporters were required to turn their shirts inside out so as not to bear the word “Truth.”

Former hacker and informant Adrian Lamo, who turned Manning in to military authorities, took the stand Tuesday. Lamo already testified during a 2011 pre-trial hearing on the lengthy chat discussions between him and Manning that took place in May 2010.

The prosecution pressed for confirmation that Manning admitted communication with Assange. Lamo said he had.

In cross-examination, Manning’s civilian lawyer David Coombs asked Lamo about Manning’s moral rationale for leaking the documents. Cables from the State Department,

Manning told him, revealed, “how first-world countries exploited third-world countries.” Asked if the soldier ever expressed hatred of America or interest in helping its enemies during their six days of chatting, Lamo said no.

Coombs quoted from the chat while addressing Lamo: “He did not believe in good guys and bad guys anymore, only a plethora of states acting in self interest. He thought he was maybe too idealistic. He told you based on what he had seen he couldn’t let the information stay inside. He said he felt connected to everybody, we were all distant family. And he said he cared.

“He called himself a humanist and said he had custom dog tags where he had written humanist on the back. PFC Manning told you that we are all human and we are killing ourselves and no one seems to care. He told you he was bothered that nobody seemed to care, that apathy was far worse than active participation. He told you that he preferred the painful truth over blissful fantasy.”

Coombs went on: “And he told you: hopefully worldwide discussions. He told you reaction to the Apache video gave him immense hope. He wanted people to see the truth. He told you people would actually change if they saw the information. He also told you that he recognized he might just be young, naive and stupid.”

After each sentence, Lamo replied, “He did.”

Lamo was told that his testimony was concluded and he would not be called back to the stand for the remainder of the three-month-long trial.

Earlier on Tuesday the government also called Army Computer Crimes Investigative Unit agents David Shaver and Mark Johnson, who were responsible for searching Manning’s personal files and computers after his 2010 arrest. In cross-examination by the defense, Johnson said nothing was found on seized hard drives suggesting “sympathy for terrorists or a transfer of funds.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact