

Bradley Manning's supervisors testify in third day of court martial

Naomi Spencer
6 June 2013

The court martial of Army private Bradley Manning continued Wednesday, with lawyers for the Obama administration calling on witnesses to testify about the former intelligence analyst's "erratic behavior" while serving in Iraq.

Manning is facing a life sentence under the Espionage Act on charges that he sent 700,000 government and military files to WikiLeaks. While the government has said it is pursuing "only" a maximum sentence of 150 years, Colonel Denise Lind, the Army judge ruling in the court martial, has the ability to impose a death sentence on the young soldier.

The government is determined to connect Manning to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, arguing that because the WikiLeaks web site is publicly available to anyone, Manning must have intended to "aid the enemy" by transmitting the material.

In the first week of the court martial, prosecutors have peppered their statements with baldly unfounded allegations that Manning intended to cause harm to US "interests," and that he was directed in this effort by WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. The government's case attempts to smear Manning as impulsive, "craving notoriety," and hateful toward America.

The aim of this political frame-up is clear. The Obama administration is currently expanding US military operations in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, and carrying out drone assassinations, torture, spying on journalists and other antidemocratic measures. It is determined to destroy Manning and others who dare to expose to the American people what is being done in their name.

The case is being used to set a precedent. Those who oppose the policies of imperialism, including other would-be whistleblowers, investigative journalists, web sites, and the population as a whole, are thereby "aiding

the enemy" and subject to the harshest penalties.

Proceedings Wednesday at Fort Meade, Maryland focused on the testimony of Manning's former supervisors. Captain Casey Fulton, head of the intelligence section where Manning worked, was cross-examined by the defense. Was there any "actual knowledge as to what web sites enemies went to get information" or any "particular web site where enemies went?" Fulton replied there was "general knowledge that it's all sorts of web sites": Facebook, Google Maps, social networking sites—all visited by hundreds of millions of ordinary Internet users. None of the sites were WikiLeaks, she testified.

Ex-military specialist Jihreah Showman was examined by government prosecutor Major Ashden Fein about security protocols at Forward Operating Base Hammer in Baghdad. She was asked about Manning's personality. Manning was "very political" and tended "on the extreme democratic side," she said. The unit signed nondisclosure agreements, she added, on the understanding that files would be "treated like the sensitive material it was." The prosecution's line of questioning centered on establishing that Manning had "knowledge" that he was not allowed to disclose information on the Internet.

In a pretrial hearing, Lind ruled that questions of motive or conscience—and by extension, the content of the material—were irrelevant to the case. The government merely has to "prove" that Manning intended for enemies of the US to see the information he is accused of leaking.

Rather than mount a political defense to expose the criminality of the government and fraudulent character of the trial, Manning's defense counsel has tried to work within the confines of these antidemocratic restrictions. Leading defense lawyer David Coombs has

repeatedly emphasized Manning's youth, "naïveté" and idealism over the past three days. The defense has already offered a guilty plea on 10 of the 20 charges, which would carry a sentence of 20 years in prison. The government refused.

Manning has already spent three years in military prison. During that time, he was tortured with solitary confinement, forced nakedness, and bullying by guards. His mistreatment at Quantico Marine brig was done at the behest of the Obama administration for the purpose of psychologically breaking him, to make him more pliant for trial. That this did not succeed is testament to the principled motivations of Manning's actions before his arrest, and belies the government's ongoing claims that he is mentally unstable and "erratic."

The military is managing Manning's court martial even more tightly than hearings for Guantanamo detainees. Most of the major media outlets, only a handful of which have been given access, have already pushed the story into the margins, republishing brief wire reports that echo the arguments of the government.

The government is monitoring the social media accounts of reporters covering the trial. On Wednesday, fewer than 20 journalists were on hand to view a video feed of the courtroom in a small, guarded trailer. They were made to sign a document promising they would not publish the names of military personnel on site.

The Army has refused to provide transcripts or documents to the press or the public. The defense counsel has been denied access to much of the evidentiary material. Some documents are reportedly being housed off-site at locations such as the headquarters of the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Absurdly, the military said Wednesday it would not employ a stenographer for the trial due to "space limitations based on building fire codes." The Freedom of the Press Foundation solicited donations to hire a court stenographer, who has attended only because a leading member of the Bradley Manning Support Network gave up his seat. Only ten members of the press and 16 others are allowed into the court.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit: