

Bradley Manning's defense rests its case

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On Wednesday, the defense rested its case in the court-martial of Bradley Manning, the US Army private who has pleaded guilty to releasing 700,000 documents exposing the crimes of US imperialism to the WikiLeaks website in April 2010.

The trial, which began June 3, has laid bare the fiercely anti-democratic character of the Obama administration, which came to power promising transparency and openness, yet has indicted more individuals for espionage (i.e., exposing government and military misdeeds) than all previous US administrations combined. The political and military establishment is now seeking to make an example of Manning to intimidate any who would follow in his courageous footsteps.

Manning is being tried for political acts in a court-martial before a military judge with almost unlimited powers. Moreover, military judge Colonel Denise Lind ruled that Manning's political motives were irrelevant to the case and could not be considered, making the proceeding a travesty of fairness and justice.

In a 35-page pre-trial statement, Manning made clear the political nature of his actions. He noted, "In attempting to conduct counter-terrorism ... and counter-insurgency (COIN) operations, we became obsessed with capturing and killing human targets on lists ... and ignoring the second- and third-order effects of accomplishing short-term goals and missions.

"I believe that if the general public, especially the American public, had access to the information ... this could spark a domestic debate on the role of the military and our foreign policy in general ... as it related to Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I also believed the detailed analysis of the data over a long period of time by different sectors of society might cause society to reevaluate the need or even the desire to even to engage in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations that ignore the complex

dynamics of the people living in the effected environment every day."

Later in his statement, Manning explained, "The more I read, the more I was fascinated by the way that we dealt with other nations and organizations. I also began to think that the documented backdoor deals and seemingly criminal activity didn't seem characteristic of the de facto leader of the free world."

Manning felt particularly strongly about this question of secret diplomacy, a central feature of the diplomatic cables released to WikiLeaks: "The more I read the cables, the more I came to the conclusion that this was the type of information that should become public." He noted that he had read about the issue of open diplomacy in regard to the First World War, and asserted that "the world would be a better place if states would avoid making secret pacts and deals with and against each other."

However, rather than utilizing the trial to further expose the crimes of the US government made public through Manning's actions, the defense, headed by military defense counsel David Coombs, has conceded that Manning is guilty of the release of classified information and has only sought to fight against the claim that his revelations aided enemies such as Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda.

In February, Manning pleaded guilty to 10 lesser charges, including unauthorized possession, willful communication and improper storage of classified material, for which he faces a 20-year sentence. However, he has pleaded not guilty to violating the Espionage and Computer Fraud and Abuse acts, which could bring him a life sentence. He has also pleaded not guilty to larceny, aiding the enemy and improper use of government information systems.

Largely disregarding Manning's sincere political convictions and concerns, Coombs has chosen to portray his client as an inept and malcontented

individual.

However, a number of defense witnesses, including Manning's supervisors during his time in Iraq, paint a much different picture of the young man.

Army Chief Warrant Officer Joshua Ehresman, who supervised Manning near Baghdad, stated that he "was our best analyst by far... He would come up with exactly what you were looking for. He was our go-to guy." He also stated that Manning's intelligence reports were "very detailed" and that he had the highest production level in their unit.

Another witness, also a friend of Manning's, Lauren McNamara, provided insight into the political factors motivating him. Providing several months of chat conversations between herself and Manning, she explained that Manning was very upset and troubled by the way civilians were treated in Iraq during his stay. "He considered human life to be valuable above all," she explained, stating that he "put people first."

Over the course of their exchange, Manning revealed to McNamara his desire to go into politics with the goal of saving families in other countries and ensuring that noncombatants were able to get home safely.

While the prosecution utilized 80 witnesses over a five-week period, the defense only presented ten in defense of Manning over the course of one week.

Coombs sought to show that while Manning did reveal classified information, it did no harm to national security. Defense witness Colonel Morris Davis, former chief military prosecutor at Guantánamo, commented in an interview with *Democracy Now!* that Manning "ought to get a reasonable sentence for what he's admitted that he did." The only bone of contention, according to such figures, is whether Manning intended to aid, or did aid, terrorist groups like Al Qaeda.



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