

Prosecution delivers closing arguments in Manning trial

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The prosecution delivered its closing arguments yesterday in the court-martial of Private Bradley Manning, the US soldier accused of providing information to WikiLeaks in the largest leak of classified information in the nation's history. Throughout the trial, prosecutors have attempted to paint Manning as arrogant and reckless, and an active accomplice of Al Qaeda, while the defense team has merely sought to show that he was well-meaning, but naïve.

Manning, who is 25-years-old, faces 21 counts relating to leaked documents on the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The most serious charge, that of “aiding the enemy,” carried a possible death sentence, though the prosecution has said that it is seeking life in prison.

The entire proceedings have been a mockery of due process and democratic procedure, spearheaded by the Obama administration. This began with the months of solitary confinement and abuse amounting to torture, and continued through the anti-democratic rules of the court martial itself. Manning is being judged by a military and political system that is itself guilty of vast crimes, crimes that Manning sought to reveal.

Army Major Ashton Fein, who delivered the government's closing argument, attempted to slander Manning, saying that he sought to “guarantee his fame” by leaking classified information. According to Fein, Manning knew that Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and its affiliate in Iraq used the Internet to gather intelligence and that Manning acted maliciously to hurt national security.

“WikiLeaks was merely the platform which Pfc. Manning used to ensure all the information was available for the world, including enemies of the United States,” Fein said. By this logic, anyone providing

information to any media source is potentially “aiding the enemy” because the information is available to everyone.

Fein also cited chat logs between Manning and informer Adrian Lamo, in which the young whistleblower said of the leaks, “Hillary Clinton, and several thousand diplomats around the world are going to have a heart attack”—as if causing discomfort to government officials was somehow proof of criminal activity.

The argument of the prosecution and the Obama administration is a blatant assault on First Amendment rights, which include freedom of speech and of the press. It is aimed at intimidating future leakers and creating the precedent for meting out the harshest punishment for anyone who reveals government criminality.

In remarks earlier this year, Manning made his intentions clear. “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.” Manning was particularly outraged by the criminal murder of innocent civilians and journalists in such war zones.

In their own arguments at the trial, Manning's attorneys have ignored the political reasoning behind Manning's actions. They have only attempted to show that the materials leaked did not reveal intelligence sources and that the battlefield reports dealt with past incidents with which “the enemy” was already familiar.

One week ago, the judge in the proceedings, Army Colonel Denise Lind, decided against dropping the most serious charge, that of “aiding the enemy,” which defense attorneys claimed the prosecution had not sufficiently evidenced.

“He was knowingly providing intelligence to the enemy,” Lind stated, but this argument flies in the face of admissions made by her own former superiors. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has stated that Manning’s leaks did not reveal any sensitive intelligence sources or methods.

In an interview, Jeff Patterson of Courage to Resist, who has spent time in the actual court room, dismissed the treason charge. “This is the first time in U.S. military history that a soldier is facing the aiding the enemy charge for giving information to the media for the public good.” The result of this court-martial will have far reaching implications, especially concerning other whistleblowers like Edward Snowden.

In a statement from the airport in Russia where he has found refuge over the past several weeks, Snowden said earlier this month, “In the end, the Obama administration is not afraid of whistleblowers like me, Bradley Manning, or Thomas Drake,” he said. “We are stateless, imprisoned, or powerless. No, the Obama administration is afraid of you. It is afraid of an informed, angry public demanding the constitutional government it was promised—and it should be.”

Manning elected to have a judge preside over his court-martial, rather than a military jury. Judge Lind will therefore decide the verdict and Manning’s ultimate fate following closing arguments from the defense today.



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