

In letter to Obama, Bradley Manning defends exposure of war crimes

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US Army Private Bradley Manning, who helped bring to light innumerable crimes of the American government and armed forces, was sentenced to 35 years in military prison Wednesday, a sentence without precedent for the “crime” of whistle-blowing.

At a press conference the same day, Manning’s attorney, David Coombes, read aloud an open letter from the 25-year-old army private to President Barack Obama. The statement will be included in a request to the Secretary of the Army asking Obama to pardon Manning or commute his sentence to time already served.

The letter is an honest, powerful document, which outlines Manning’s motives for leaking hundreds of thousands of classified documents. It is unlike the stage-managed “confession” that Manning was obliged to give before his military tribunal in Ft. Meade, Maryland on August 14, during which he apologized for his actions.

In his letter to Obama, Manning first explains that the decision to release the incriminating material was “made out of a concern for my country and the world that we live in.” He adds that he agreed at first with the methods adopted by US authorities following 9/11. Not until Manning was deployed to Iraq and began “reading secret military reports on a daily basis” did he start “to question the morality of what we were doing.”

The Army private notes that the US military “consciously elected to devalue human life both in Iraq and Afghanistan.” When American forces killed “innocent civilians ... instead of accepting responsibility for our conduct, we elected to hide behind the veil of national security and classified information in order to avoid any public accountability.”

Manning lists other crimes: “We held individuals at Guantanamo for years without due process. We inexplicably turned a blind eye to torture and executions by the Iraqi government. And we stomached countless other acts in the name of our war on terror.”

The young whistleblower compares the “morally questionable acts” committed in Iraq and Afghanistan to other “dark moments” in US history: “the Trail of Tears [the

forced relocation of Native Americans in the 1830s], the Dred Scott [pro-slavery] decision, McCarthyism, and the Japanese-American internment camps—to mention a few.” He adds that he is confident “that many of the actions since 9/11 will one day be viewed in a similar light.”

Manning cites the comment of the late Howard Zinn, “There is not a flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people.”

He concludes his letter to Obama by noting that if his request for a pardon is denied, “I will serve my time knowing that sometimes you have to pay a heavy price to live in a free society. I will gladly pay that price if it means we could have a country that is truly conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all women and men are created equal.”

The US government, the Pentagon and the American media have done everything in their power to stigmatize Manning, to smear and degrade him in the eyes of the public. It must be said, however, that in the directness with which he approaches the issues, in his disgust for the crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan and in his courage, Manning bears a far, far greater resemblance to the overwhelming majority of the American people than do the officials who rule in its name.

Manning, in fact, advances views and sentiments held by countless millions in the US, including a sincere devotion to the principles enunciated by Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address [“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”]

Official America long ago betrayed and repudiated those principles, and presides over a nation where the rich own or steal everything they can get their hands on and the US military goes to war everywhere to protect the interests of that tiny elite.

In official Washington, Manning’s letter will fall on deaf and, indeed, hostile ears. Barack Obama, elected in 2008 as the candidate of “change” and the political beneficiary of the

accumulated hatred of masses of people for the Bush-Cheney administration, has shown himself to be the implacable defender of American capitalist interests and the implacable foe of the working class and its elementary democratic rights.

As Obama's angry response to the actions of former NSA employee Edward Snowden has revealed, hardly anything outrages the intelligence-bureaucrat in the White House more than the exposure of the American state's "national security" secrets.

With typical brutality and indifference, the White House, according to the Associated Press, indicated Manning's request would be considered "like any other application." The AP continues, "However, a pardon seems unlikely. Manning's case was part of an unprecedented string of prosecutions brought by the U.S. government in a crackdown on security breaches. The Obama administration has charged seven people with leaking to the media; only three people were prosecuted under all previous presidents combined."

Underscoring the degree to which the illegal wars and invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan are the consensus policy of the US ruling elite, Obama's Department of Justice went to federal court in San Francisco the day before Manning's sentencing in defense of George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and others who are being sued by an Iraqi woman for violating international law.

Sundus Shaker Saleh, a single mother of three now living in Jordan, is the lead plaintiff in a class action lawsuit targeting six key members of the previous administration: Bush, Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and Paul Wolfowitz.

The lawsuit alleges that the Bush administration officials "broke the law in conspiring and committing the crime of aggression against the people of Iraq." It further charges that the defendants "planned the war against Iraq as early as 1998; manipulated the United States public to support the war by scaring them with images of 'mushroom clouds' and conflating the Hussein regime with al-Qaeda; and broke international law by commencing the invasion without proper legal authorization."

Furthermore, Saleh's lawsuit notes, "More than sixty years ago, American prosecutors in Nuremberg, Germany convicted Nazi leaders of the crimes of conspiring and waging wars of aggression. They found the Nazis guilty of planning and waging wars that had no basis in law and which killed millions of innocents."

The plaintiff "was an innocent civilian victim and of the Iraq War. She seeks justice under the Nuremberg principles and United States law for the damages she and others like her suffered because of Defendants' premeditated plan to

invade Iraq."

Saleh's complaint makes a critical point the WSWS has often referred to, that the chief crime prosecuted against the Nazis in the Nuremberg trials "was the **crime of aggression**: engaging in a premeditated war without lawful reason." [Emphasis in the original.] It cites the comment of chief counsel for the United States at Nuremberg, Robert H. Jackson: "Any resort to war—to any kind of a war— **is a resort to means that are inherently criminal**. War inevitably is a course of killings, assaults, deprivations of liberty, and destruction of property." [Again, emphasis in the original.]

The complaint goes on to explain, quite correctly, how (a) "Once in power, the defendants use 9/11 as cover to plan their aggressive war against Iraq," (b) "Defendants execute a plan to scare the American public so that they can invade Iraq" and, finally, (c) "Defendants commit the crime of aggression against Iraq."

The legal document creates a class of "Iraq Civilian Victims," noting that "it is likely that hundreds of thousands or even millions of Iraqis may have been subject to damages as a result of Defendants' actions."

The lawsuit, which accurately and articulately sums up the aggressive, criminal character of the US intervention in Iraq has no hope of succeeding in an American court, where the legal system, in every previous challenge to the Iraq war policy, has exonerated US officials.

On August 20, Obama Department of Justice officials filed court papers in response to Saleh's lawsuit, arguing that Bush, Cheney and the others should be granted immunity on the grounds that they "were each acting within the scope of their federal office or employment at the time of the incidents" out of which the counts in the complaint arose.

In other words, in the true spirit of the Nazi defendants at Nuremberg, they were simply 'doing their jobs.' In fact, of course, they were—they were performing as the obedient servants of the American corporate-financial elite.

On August 20, the Obama administration went to court to shield the perpetrators of war crimes in Iraq. On August 21, American authorities handed down a savage sentence to an individual who helped expose certain of those crimes. Things could hardly be clearer.



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