

The New York Times and Manning's prison sentence

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In an editorial published yesterday, “Bradley Manning’s Excessive Sentence,” the *New York Times* has endorsed the suppression of whistleblowers spearheaded by the Obama administration.

Though objecting mildly to the length of Manning’s 35-year sentence, the *Times* explicitly endorsed his imprisonment. The position of what passes for American liberalism is “Keep Manning behind bars, but not for a third of a century.” The *Times* editors do not say what they think Manning’s jail time should be. Twenty years, perhaps?

In an astonishing proclamation of moral solidarity with the government prosecutors, the *Times* wrote: “Certainly, Private Manning faced punishment. In providing more than 700,000 government files to WikiLeaks—extensive excerpts of which were published in the *New York Times* and other publications—he broke the law and breached his responsibility as a military intelligence analyst to protect those files. It was by far the biggest leak of classified documents in U.S. history, and thus it is not surprising that the punishment would be the longest ever on record for leaking such information.”

The *Times* even applauded Manning’s dishonorable discharge and the stripping of his rank, ordered by presiding judge Army Col. Denise R Lind, declaring: “Those are appropriate punishments.”

Though no longer surprising, the hostility of the media to those who expose government secrets represents a flagrant repudiation of the principles of a democratic press. There was a time when major newspapers actually believed that it was their responsibility to protect and support those who exposed government secrets, especially when the secrets pertained to arguably illegal and unconstitutional activity.

Such quaint democratic notions belong to another age. Now, the editors of newspapers function like station chiefs for the CIA and other intelligence agencies. When a leading editor or correspondent like Bill Keller of the *Times* is contacted by a whistleblower, his virtually instinctual response is to immediately tip off the government.

From the standpoint of the *Times* editorial board, the primary danger is that other whistleblowers will step forward, undeterred by the threat of jail time. The vital question, from this perspective, is what the US government “will do when faced with future leaks, an inevitability when 92 million documents are classified in a year and more than 4 million Americans have security clearance.”

Acknowledging that a primary aim of the prosecution was to dissuade other whistleblowers from imitating Snowden, the *Times* editors nevertheless lament that even long prison terms do not suffice to deter the exposure of government crimes.

“Prosecutors were also trying to discourage other potential leakers, but as the continuing release of classified documents by Edward Snowden shows, even the threat of significant prison time is not a deterrent when people believe their government keeps too many secrets.”

The *Times* itself was and is complicit in the US government criminality and atrocities exposed by Manning. The editors find it necessary to lie and to completely ignore crucial elements of the Manning story in order to defend their newspapers’ record of support for the crimes Manning exposed.

Among the major files leaked by Manning was the notorious “Collateral Murder” video, which shows US helicopter pilots firing on civilian targets with heavy weaponry while bantering with one another in a joking

manner. Such occurrences were commonplace during the US war against Iraq, which was heavily promoted from the pages of the *Times*.

Also leaked by Manning were “war logs,” which contain hundreds of thousands of incident reports exposing the social devastation and dysfunction wrought by America’s neocolonial occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the cables transferred by Manning to WikiLeaks showed that US defense contractor DynCorp, which is paid nearly \$2 billion annually by the US government, had purchased boys from human traffickers for a party the contractor held in Afghanistan.

Another cable publicized by Manning showed the head of Egyptian state security thanking the FBI for training his interrogators in more effective torture techniques during a training program in Virginia. Taken together, the documents brought forward by Manning implicate the US government in countless illegal activities spanning the entire globe.

Moreover, the *Times* makes no mention of Manning’s treatment over years of pre-trial confinement, or of President Barack Obama’s pre-trial assertion that Manning “broke the law”—a clear violation of the principle that the accused is innocent until proven guilty. Both of these represented sufficient reasons to dismiss the charges altogether.

Manning was tortured by US security services during years of pre-trial confinement. He began his detention in a wire cage in Kuwait, where he was held for two months after admitting to leaking the documents in an online conversation. After his transfer to the Marine Corps brig in Quantico, Virginia, he was placed on “prevention-of-injury” (POI) status, the prison’s maximum alert status.

According to Gunnery Sergeant William Fuller, who has worked in military prisons for 17 years, POI status is assigned for “a few days. No more than a week.” Manning remained on POI status for nine months. He was held in solitary confinement in a 6’ x 8’ cell, where he was forced to sleep from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m. and only allowed out of his cell for 20 minutes each day. Manning underwent extensive forced nudity and frequently had his underwear confiscated.

Judging from the online comments posted by the *Times*, the editorial endorsing Manning’s imprisonment has been met with widespread disgust among its own

readers. One letter reflective of the general sentiment stated: “Manning should be pardoned and given a medal. Wall Street criminals go unpunished. War criminals go unpunished. The Times cheered on the Iraq War. The Times is in no position to judge Manning.”

Before his arrest Manning wrote: “If you had free rein over classified networks for long periods ... and you saw incredible things, awful things ... things that belonged in the public domain, and not on some server stored in a dark room in Washington DC ... what would you do?”

One can answer: do not bring them to the *New York Times*, whatever you do!



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