

# US army threatens whistleblower Chelsea Manning with indefinite solitary confinement

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Following whistleblower Chelsea Manning's recent suicide attempt, the US Army is vindictively threatening her with indefinite solitary confinement. Manning is incarcerated at a military prison at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas. She is serving a 35-year sentence for releasing 700,000 classified government documents, revealing widespread criminality, to WikiLeaks.

Manning has been subject to nearly continuous harassment by military and prison authorities since her detention in 2010. On Thursday the former intelligence analyst, previously known as Bradley Manning, was informed that she could face charges related to her July 5 attempt to end her life, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The possible charges include "resisting the force cell move team," possessing "prohibited property" and "conduct which threatens."

If convicted of these charges, Manning could be punished with indefinite solitary confinement, reclassification into maximum security and an additional nine years in custody. A conviction could also block any chances for parole in the future. This is pure and unadulterated cruelty.

The army investigation is part of an ongoing campaign by the Obama administration to harass and torture Manning as punishment for her decision to expose crimes, and part of an effort to intimidate others from exposing government and military wrongdoing.

The US military has used a range of methods to psychologically abuse Manning. Prior to her trial, she was put on suicide watch, forcing her to be confined to a small room for the majority of the day for roughly nine months. Manning later described the conditions in isolation as "cruel, degrading, and inhumane, and ... effectively a 'no touch' torture."

A February 2014 *American Journal of Public Health* study by the *Public Health* found that there was a pronounced tendency toward suicide and self-harm among people placed in solitary confinement. The researchers noted that prisoners in New York City jails were seven times more likely to commit an act of self-harm than someone in the general population. The report also revealed that 73 percent of suicides in California prisons took place inside isolation units.

Following the months of solitary confinement, Manning has continued to be hounded by the army and been forced to spend lengthy periods of time in solitary for minor infractions.

Last year, the army almost sentenced Manning to be placed in solitary confinement indefinitely for possessing unauthorized reading material and an expired tube of toothpaste. The panel at the Fort Leavenworth military prison only decided to issue a lesser sentence of 21 days of restrictions on recreational activities—such as access to the gym and library and going outside—after over 100,000 individuals signed a petition demanding that the charges against Manning be dropped.

ACLU attorney Chase Strangio told the *Huffington Post* that Manning's "big fear is formal isolation. She relies on access to phones and written communication. If that were cut off, I'd be even more worried."

Manning—who is a transgender woman, but is forced to serve her sentence in an all-male prison—has also explained that she is extremely depressed as a result of the prison's refusal to provide treatment for her condition, known as gender dysphoria. She filed a lawsuit last year against the Department of Defense in order to receive treatment.

As part of the lawsuit, Manning's lawyers stated in court documents that she suffered "continued pain,

depression and anxiety and is at an extremely high risk of self-castration and suicidality” if she were not provided with some form of treatment. She was later provided with hormone therapy.

The constant persecution has had a devastating effect on her mental state. The ACLU’s Strangio explained, “Now, while Chelsea is suffering the darkest depression she has experienced since her arrest, the government is taking actions to punish her for that pain. It is unconscionable and we hope that the investigation is immediately ended and that she is given the health care that she needs to recover.”

The ACLU has also stated that, “The Army continues to deny Chelsea access to basic health care, including inadequate medical treatment after her suicide attempt.”

While Manning has been the victim of ongoing persecution, it cannot be discounted that the recent charges are part of an effort to further intimidate whistleblowers following WikiLeaks’ recent release of roughly 20,000 Democratic National Committee internal emails.

Since the most recent release, the *New York Times* has denounced the leak as part of a convoluted plot between Russia, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Similar statements have been made by the Hillary Clinton campaign, which has sought to bolster Clinton’s credentials as the most reliable candidate on military and intelligence questions.



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