Trump issues full pardon to former lieutenant who executed prisoner in Iraq

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US President Donald Trump signed a grant of clemency for former US Army first lieutenant Michael Behenna on Tuesday, fully pardoning him of war crimes for which he was convicted in 2009. Behenna was found guilty of the 2008 murder of Ali Mansur Mohamed in Iraq and has been associated with a group of US military personnel convicted of war crimes often referred to as the "Leavenworth 10."

After his conviction, Behenna was sentenced to serve 25 years in the United States Disciplinary Barracks, the military prison located in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. His sentence was reduced to 15 years by the army clemency and parole board, and he was granted parole under Democratic President Barack Obama in 2014 after serving only five years of his prison sentence.

Behenna killed Mansur while questioning him about a roadside bombing that killed members of the platoon which Behenna commanded. He effectively kidnapped Mansur after he was released from custody due to a lack of evidence connecting him to the explosions, and instead decided to question Mansur on his own, according to an interview favorable to his case published in the *Washington Post* last month.

During his trial Behenna confessed that he took Mansur to a railroad covert, then stripped him naked and held a gun to his head before he finally shot him in what amounted to an extrajudicial execution.

Behenna's defense attorneys said that he had acted in self-defense because Mansur had tried to take his weapon. However, it is highly unlikely that a naked and defenseless prisoner would have been able to attack Behenna, a physically intimidating army lieutenant who had already threatened to kill him.

The execution of Mansur in a most degrading and brutal fashion, along with Behenna's claim of acting in "self-defense," could be taken straight out of the playbook of the hundreds of police killings that take place in the US each year. The pardon by Trump likewise dovetails with the impunity granted to such police killers, who are almost never prosecuted.

Behenna's case and that of the convicted soldiers held in Fort Leavenworth—small fry compared to the major war criminals like Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Obama—has garnered vocal support from the most right-wing layers of the ruling establishment, including elected officials, conservative news outlets, and the military.

Last December, President Trump intervened on behalf of Army Major and former Green Beret Mathew Golsteyn, also convicted of war crimes in Iraq, to say that he would review his case, calling him a "hero." Trump also tweeted that he would move Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher to less restrictive confinement before his trial, charged with fatally stabbing and disrespecting the corpse of a teenage prisoner in Iraq.

The pardon comes at a time when the entire US ruling establishment is shifting far to the right in the face of mounting opposition by the international working class to austerity and war. The presence of white supremacist and fascist cells in the US military and police forces has recently been exposed, showing that war criminals like Behenna, Golsteyn, Gallagher and others are not outliers, but are being actively cultivated in the military for the ruling class to use to terrorize and oppress the working class both within the US and abroad.

The future war criminal had a police background: his father was a former FBI and Oklahoma state bureau of investigation agent, his mother a longtime federal prosecutor.

It is people like Behenna who the ruling establishment want to recruit and cultivate as brutal

killers in the US military. After expressing the desire to "fight terrorists" after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York City, Behenna enrolled in the ROTC program while in college at the University of Central Oklahoma. After graduation, he was selected to attend the US Army's Ranger School and was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division as a platoon leader when he was deployed to Iraq.

President Trump, who has gathered around him fascist advisers, military generals and white supremacists, aims to embolden these far-right layers within the military and police with the pardoning of Behenna. No prominent Democrat will echo the statement issued by the American Civil Liberties Union, which branded the pardon "the presidential endorsement of a murder."

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