

# As Assange faces 170-year sentence, Trump proposes pardoning US war criminals

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President Trump's announcement that he may pardon several US soldiers charged or convicted of war crimes is an appeal to the military and a signal that any restraints will be removed as American imperialism prepares more wars.

On Friday, Trump confirmed an earlier *New York Times* report that the administration has "made expedited requests" for pardon papers. "Some of these soldiers are people that have fought hard and long," Trump said. "We teach them how to be great fighters, and then when they fight sometimes they get really treated very unfairly. So we're going to take a look at it."

Trump was referring to soldiers whose actions epitomize the depraved and criminal character of the US "war on terror." They include:

- Chief Petty Officer Edward Gallagher, who from 2017 to 2018 shot a young girl and an elderly man from the safety of his sniper's perch in Iraq and murdered a young prisoner of war by stabbing him repeatedly with a hunting knife before posing with the victim's body.

- Nicholas Slatten, a former Blackwater mercenary who was recently convicted of murder for his involvement in the 2007 Nisour Square massacre, during which Blackwater thugs killed dozens of Iraqi civilians.

- Mathew Golsteyn, who currently faces trial for murder after admitting live on Fox News that he executed an unarmed alleged Taliban member after the latter was released from detention by Afghan authorities. On March 30, Trump tweeted that Golsteyn is a "US military hero."

- Clint Lorange, a soldier who is presently serving a 19-year sentence for killing three Afghan men at long distance in 2012.

Earlier in May, Trump pardoned Michael Behenna, an Army officer who was convicted and jailed for murdering an Iraqi prisoner who had been ordered released from detention, by placing a grenade under his head.

Pardoning war criminals itself constitutes a war crime under the Nuremberg principles. In 1969, then-President Richard Nixon and his henchmen covered up details of the massacre of 504 civilians committed by US troops in the South Vietnamese village of My Lai in 1968. The day after Lt. William Calley was sentenced to life for perpetrating the massacre, Nixon had him transferred to house arrest. By 1974, Calley was out on bail.

But Trump has taken this record to new depths as the US prepares for more wars. Trump's remarks regarding potential pardons came as the government announced the deployment of an additional 1,500 soldiers to confront Iran in the Middle East. Within hours of Trump's statement, Vice President Michael Pence told West Point graduates Saturday that "it is a virtual certainty that you will fight on a battlefield for America at some point in your life."

By signaling his willingness to pardon war criminals, Trump is establishing the authoritarian power of the executive to create a "state of exception" that shrouds the entire military apparatus in legal immunity.

In March, 40 Republican members of Congress signed a letter to the Secretary of the Navy calling for Gallagher's release. It reads, "To confine any service member for that duration of time, regardless the

authority to do so, sends a chilling message to those who fight for our freedoms.” The letter calls for a “less severe form of restraint” and demands the detained war criminal be “given a fair trial.”

The campaign to defend and lionize those who murder civilians in defense of US imperialism exposes the class character of the bipartisan campaign against Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. Behind all the baseless lies about sexual assault or collaborating with Trump or Russia, Assange is the enemy of American imperialism because he exposed the criminality of its wars to the people of the world.

Assange and Manning exposed not only the war criminals on the ground, but also the war criminals in Washington and their media propagandists who launched the wars and are responsible for the deaths of millions of civilians and thousands of US and allied soldiers. None of these individuals have been held accountable.

The Trump administration has now announced 17 charges against Assange under the Espionage Act of 1917, threatening him with 170 years in prison. The indictment, developed from the precedents set by the Obama administration during its eight Espionage Act prosecutions, paves the way for criminalizing opposition to war.

Growing numbers of people are outraged at the treatment of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning.

Assange’s supporters are not to be found in the editorial rooms of newspapers like the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*, who wish the government would lock up Assange on a pretense that does not threaten their own right to publish. Nor are Assange’s defenders to be found in publications like *Jacobin* magazine or in the Democratic Socialists of America, whose leaders and political figureheads have remained mute about the persecution of Assange.

The objective source of support for Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning is the international working class. It is this social force that is the primary target of American imperialist intervention all over the world. It is their homes and schools that are destroyed by American bombs. It is their children who drown in the Mediterranean escaping war-torn disaster zones.

In the US itself, it is the working class that has paid for the wars in treasure and blood. The ruling class has directed trillions of dollars away from social programs,

healthcare and education to pay for death and destruction abroad. Thousands of working-class youth, escaping unemployment and lack of opportunity, have died in imperialist wars. Tens of thousands more are wounded, physically and mentally, and millions more are personally impacted by soldier suicide, depression or substance abuse.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the broadest possible campaign among the working class to demand Assange and Manning’s liberation. Defend the class war prisoners, Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning! What is at stake is not only the freedom of two courageous individuals but also the fight to stop imperialist war and transform society on an egalitarian, socialist basis.



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