

Bradley Manning:
Traitor or Whistleblower?

By Catherine Connor

Bradley Manning is the 24 year-old army intelligence analyst who has been in solitary confinement for more than 18 months. During the Christmas holidays the US Army has been hearing evidence as to whether this soldier should face a full court martial and serve a lifetime in military prison.

Manning is alleged to have leaked over 250,000 embassy cables to WikiLeaks, which in turn, made them available to a global internet audience. Hailed as a both a truth-teller and condemned as a traitor by the outside world, Bradley Manning is charged with exposing war crimes and other state secrets that potentially aid terrorist enemies. Of the defense's 38 witnesses, 36 were denied. Nobody from the Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia was allowed to discuss Manning's pretrial confinement. The defense was allowed to present only two witnesses to testify that Manning's emotional instability regarding his sexual and gender identity crisis made him behave unnaturally, causing him to release classified documents. Further, Manning's defense criticized the military's lack of security, in particular, the storing of government secrets on unlabeled CDs as well as maintaining classified computer files intermixed with recreational movies and computer games.

The prosecution called witnesses who testified that Manning downloaded illegal software in order to upload confidential United States information. The viewing of classified documents, the illegal downloads, and the sharing of the material are three types of charges that make up the 22 separate counts against Manning. Most incriminating are chat room transcripts in which Adrian Lamo, a former hacker posing as journalist and minister, persuaded Manning to talk about his contact with Julian Assange, WikiLeaks founder, and to incriminate himself in the leaking of government cables and videos.

Prominent among the leaked documents were video clips of US soldiers from a helicopter shooting a group of unarmed citizens. Another video shows US soldiers raiding a family household, killing both children and adults and then bombing the house to destroy evidence. No soldiers responsible for these alleged war crimes have been prosecuted.

Supporters argue that Manning is a heroic whistleblower willing to risk his own freedom in order to reveal war crimes. Detractors insist that the traitorous behavior of releasing state secrets is a capital offense meriting at least life in prison. However, the State Department and McClatchy media outlets admitted that not a single person has been attacked or killed as the result of Manning's alleged leaks.

Amnesty International and the United Nations have voiced concerns about the effects of solitary confinement endured by Manning, resulting in his transfer to a different military prison. Thousands of US citizens have protested against the US Army decision to prosecute Manning and his treatment in confinement. Manning supporters have also been concerned about the Christmas-time hearing which controlled media access to the trial: The US army selected a small number of journalists to report on the pre-trial hearing who were all under military escort while on the base. The hearing was held a week before Christmas day, including over the weekend, which further reduced journalist access.

The Manning case compels Americans to ask the questions: Are we a nation that stands in defense of someone reporting a war crime or a nation that condones such crimes, allowing the persecution of the whistleblower and the crimes themselves to go unpunished?

Bradley Manning's pretrial decision will be delivered January 16, 2012.