



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on June 6, 2013

Critics Blast Military Trial of WikiLeaks Whistleblower Manning

After a [global outcry](#) about his prosecution and [alleged torture](#), whistleblower Bradley Manning (shown), an Army intelligence officer accused of “aiding the enemy” by leaking hundreds of thousands of U.S. government documents exposing [war crimes](#) and [countless dubious diplomatic](#) dealings to WikiLeaks, is finally on trial this week. The [secretive](#) court-martial proceeding, widely criticized as a show trial with a predetermined outcome, began Monday and is expected to run for around three months.



If convicted, which would supposedly require prosecutors to show that Manning knew the leaked documents would be seen by enemies of the U.S. government, the defendant could spend life in military prison. The penalty could have included death, but authorities promised not to seek capital punishment amid [global outrage](#) against prosecuting somebody who tried to expose government crimes. Manning and his attorney decided that the trial should take place before a military judge rather than a full panel.

The young whistleblower, who has attracted [legions of supporters](#) to his cause despite drawing the wrath of the Obama administration, defended his actions in a February [statement](#) to the court. “I believed that if the public, especially the American public, had access to the information ... this could spark a domestic debate on the role of the military and our foreign policy in general, as well as it related to Iraq and Afghanistan,” Manning said.

Commenting about the estimated 250,000 secret diplomatic cables from the U.S. State Department that he sent to WikiLeaks, Manning also said it was important for the public to know what its government was doing. According to his statement, the cables “documented backdoor deals and seemingly criminal activity.” Indeed, as *The New American* has [reported](#), the documents revealed everything from U.S. authorities’ unlawful [spying](#) and [lying](#) to [bribing and bullying](#) of foreign governments.

The leaked material from the Army, meanwhile — including [now-infamous footage of U.S. troops gunning down civilians from a helicopter](#) in what analysts said was clearly a war crime — exposed the “seemingly delightful bloodlust” of those American soldiers “congratulating each other on the ability to kill in large numbers,” Manning said in the statement. Despite the charges against Manning, it was not immediately clear how exposing war crimes would aid the enemy.

Military prosecutors, however, allege that the massive leak — likely the largest in American history — jeopardized U.S. national security and endangered lives. The government also claims that al-Qaeda operatives, many of whom have been armed and funded by the Obama administration [during the war on Libya](#) and [the rebellion in Syria](#), have seen the documents and made use of them.

“Pfc. Manning was trained and trusted to provide intelligence,” Army prosecutor Capt. Ashden Fein was quoted as saying in transcripts from a previous hearing. “He used that training to defy our trust, to systematically and indiscriminately harm the United States during a time of war and while deployed.”



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Indeed, despite evidence that Manning saw himself as a whistleblower and the fact that no serious national security issues have been linked to the explosive disclosures, prosecutors are trying to paint the defendant as a man who knowingly aided terrorist groups.

In addition to supposedly “aiding the enemy,” Manning, now 25, is facing 21 charges of illegally downloading and transferring some 700,000 secret reports, videos, and other material — much of it classified but none of it “Top Secret.” He has already [pleaded guilty to 10 charges](#) of “mishandling classified information,” which could put him behind bars for 20 years even if the other allegations are thrown out. The trial is happening at Ft. Meade in Maryland outside of Baltimore.

In all, some 150 witnesses are expected to testify at the court martial, with the vast majority being called by the prosecution. The man who reported Manning to authorities, ex-computer hacker Adrian Lamo, [testified](#) on Tuesday, telling the court how the Army analyst had told him in online chats about the efforts to expose government crimes and civilian casualties in the wars. When asked whether Manning had expressed hope that the leaks exposing various problems would spark global discussions and reforms, for example, Lamo answered “yes.”

Lamo also admitted to asking Manning why he did not sell the documents to a foreign government instead. According to Lamo’s testimony, the Army private said it was because he thought the information should be available to the general public — hardly the hallmark of somebody hoping to “aid the enemy.” The former hacker, though, claimed he reported Manning because it was the “socially responsible” thing to do.

Former Manning colleagues and superiors also [testified](#) at this week’s hearings before court was recessed on Wednesday. Their testimony portrayed the Army private as a well-organized computer genius and an excellent intelligence analyst who was very interested in political and social issues. The court will be back in session next week, and numerous other witnesses will testify.

While government prosecutors attempt to demonize Manning and his motives, a growing roster of prominent supporters are speaking out on his behalf. Before the trial officially began on Monday, Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg and other activists with the Bradley Manning Support Network gathered outside of the Ft. Meade gate to protest what they see as vicious persecution of an American hero.

“We are all Bradley Manning,” demonstrators [reportedly](#) chanted. Ellsberg, the famous leaker who has been a vocal and high-profile advocate for Manning, also blasted the administration: “I’m sure that President Obama would have sought a life sentence in my case,” he [said](#). More than a few critics noted that the administration has prosecuted more whistleblowers than any other in history.

WikiLeaks chief Julian Assange, meanwhile, released a [scathing editorial](#) on the first day of the trial, calling Manning the “most prominent political prisoner in modern U.S. history.” Among other complaints, the world famous leak master slammed the military’s “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment” of the whistleblower “at the hands of his captors.” Assange also said the government’s behavior in the case was criminal, suggesting the trial was being conducted in a kangaroo court that refuses to let Manning defend himself and that the verdict has already been pre-determined.

Even though Manning helped provide journalists and the public around the world with a gold mine of explosive information on government corruption and lawlessness, news of the trial this week has [largely been ignored or downplayed](#) by the establishment press. In fairness, however, that might have something to do with the veil of secrecy imposed over the court martial by authorities.



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A group of organizations and attorneys filed yet another federal lawsuit last month asking that more information be made available to the public. "The press and public are unable to engage in careful observation and analysis of the issues arising during what is arguably one of the most controversial, high-profile court-martials since the trial of Lt. William Calley for the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam," noted a coalition of lawyers and Manning advocates in a brief.

Other analysts have noted that even larger issues are also being mostly overlooked, including what critics and experts have widely described as the barbaric torture of Private Manning. Even worse, the war crimes and lawless behavior of the U.S. government that the Army analyst helped blow the whistle on have also been largely forgotten. Meanwhile, as the Obama administration desperately seeks to punish Manning, the perpetrators of the myriad real crimes exposed in the leaked documents remain at large.

Photo of Army Pfc. Bradley Manning being escorted out of a courthouse in Ft. Meade, Maryland June 5: AP Images

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