

Bradley Manning Suffering Extreme Isolation Prison Torture — Courageous Whistleblower ‘Physically Deteriorating’

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Global Research, December 26, 2010
[AlterNet](#) 26 December 2010

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Law and Justice](#)

Last week, Bradley Manning, the soldier accused of giving classified materials to Wikileaks, spent his 23rd birthday in the brig of the Marine Corps Base in Quantico, Virginia. He has been convicted of no crime, but endures the kind of highly restrictive detention that's usually reserved for the most dangerous criminals in America's supermax prisons. He is kept isolated in his cell 23 hours a day, where he is cut off from most human contact, denied reading materials and personal items, prevented by the guards from exercising and regularly awakened from his sleep. He has been at Quantico for five months, following two months of detention in Kuwait.

The circumstances of Manning's detention gained prominence last week after Salon's Glenn Greenwald wrote a scathing exposé of what he [called](#) "conditions that constitute cruel and inhumane treatment and, by the standards of many nations, even torture." As AlterNet's Sarah Seltzer [noted](#), the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture has started a probe to determine whether Manning's solitary confinement constitutes torture under international law.

The Pentagon reacted to the story by claiming that Manning is "a maximum custody detainee" who can "receive the same privileges that a detainee classified as general population may receive ... [including] daily television, hygiene call, reading and outside physical activity without restraint." But David House, one of the few people able to visit Manning, said that [Manning told him](#) he'd only been allowed outdoors sporadically, and his exercise consisted of being placed in a room where he can only walk around in circles.

Manning also has a "Prevention of Injury" (POI) order that requires him to be constantly monitored by guards, and prevents him from having normal bedding. He has to strip down to his underwear and surrender his clothes to the guards each night before sleeping under a "suicide blanket" – he told House it's "similar in weight and heft to lead aprons used in X-ray laboratories, and similar in texture to coarse and stiff carpet." Manning "expressed concern that he had to lie very still at night to avoid receiving carpet burns." According to Greenwald, prison medical officials are administering him antidepressants.

POI orders are usually issued for brief periods of time for inmates who are judged to be suicidal or have not yet undergone a psychological evaluation. Manning has been evaluated, and there is no indication he is a threat to himself or others. He has been, by all accounts, a model prisoner.

Clinical psychologist Jeff Kaye spoke to House after his visit with Manning, and while he

stressed that a complete evaluation of Manning's well-being is impossible without personal contact, he predicted that "Solitary confinement will slowly wear down the mental and physical condition of Bradley Manning."

Solitary confinement is an assault on the body and psyche of an individual. It deprives him of species-specific forms of physical, sensory and social interaction with the environment and other human beings. Manning reported last weekend he had not seen sunlight in four weeks, nor does he interact with other people but a few hours on the weekend. The human nervous system needs a certain amount of sensory and social stimulation to retain normal brain functioning. The effects of this deprivation on individuals varies, and some people are affected more severely or quickly, while others hold out longer against the boredom and daily grind of dullness that never seems to end.

Over time, isolation [produces](#) a particular well-known syndrome which is akin to that of an organic brain disorder, or delirium. The list of possible effects upon a person is quite long, and can include an inability to tolerate ordinary stimuli, sleep and appetite disturbances, primitive forms of thinking and aggressive ruminations, perceptual distortions and hallucinations, agitation, panic attacks, claustrophobia, feelings of loss of control, rage, paranoia, memory loss, lack of concentration, generalized body pain, EEG abnormalities, depression, suicidal ideation and random, self-destructive behavior.

According to Kaye, the detention is already having effects on Manning – he appears to have difficulty concentrating and his physical condition is deteriorating.

As Glenn Greenwald notes, prolonged solitary confinement is, "widely viewed around the world as highly injurious, inhumane, punitive, and arguably even a form of torture."

In his widely praised [March, 2009 New Yorker article](#)— entitled "Is Long-Term Solitary Confinement Torture?" — the surgeon and journalist Atul Gawande assembled expert opinion and personal anecdotes to demonstrate that, as he put it, "all human beings experience isolation as torture." By itself, prolonged solitary confinement routinely destroys a person's mind and drives them into insanity. A March, 2010 article in The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law [explains that](#) "solitary confinement is recognized as difficult to withstand; indeed, psychological stressors such as isolation can be as clinically distressing as physical torture."

It's important to recognize that Manning is a true whistleblower – according to chat logs obtained by [Wired](#) magazine, Manning saw what he viewed as serious crimes committed by U.S. forces in Iraq, and felt compelled to release the information in the hope that it would spark "worldwide discussion, debates, and reforms." "I want people to see the truth," he wrote, "regardless of who they are... because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public." He succeeded in that – the release of video showing an [American helicopter attack on a group of unarmed civilians](#), and subsequent attack on rescuers rushing to evacuate the survivors, was an eye-opening look at the horrors of war that's never seen in the sanitized footage released by the military.

Given that Manning has not been shown to be suicidal or a threat to others, it's hard to disagree with Wikileaks' founder Julian Assange's [claim](#) that "Manning is being held as a political prisoner in the United States."

Greenwald wrote that what Manning's solitary confinement "achieves is clear."

Having it known that the U.S. could and would disappear people at will to "black sites," assassinate them with unseen drones, imprison them for years without a shred of due process even while [knowing](#) they were [innocent](#), torture them mercilessly, and in general acts as a lawless and rogue imperial power created a climate of severe intimidation and fear. Who would want to challenge the U.S. government in any way — even in legitimate ways — knowing that it could and would engage in such lawless, violent conduct without any restraints or repercussions?

Bradley Manning's detention is not comparable with the horrific measures imposed on Jose Padilla, an American citizen who was accused of plotting to detonate a "dirty bomb" and held as an "enemy combatant" for six years before being convicted on a lesser charge. Padilla's attorneys [alleged](#) that he was subjected to sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation, and tortured with psychotropic drugs until he lost his mind. But Manning is also a 23-year-old who, whether he is right or wrong, thought he was doing the right thing, and has now run into the maw of a vindictive American security state.

Fyodor Dostoevsky famously said that "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons." The Web site FireDogLake has asked people to sign a letter urging the military to stop its "inhumane" treatment of Bradley Manning. You can add your name [here](#).

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