

Obama's War on Whistle Blowers: The Trial of Bradley Manning

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"If you had free reign over classified networks... and you saw incredible things, awful things... things that belonged in the public domain, and not on some server stored in a dark room in Washington DC... what would you do?"

"God knows what happens now. Hopefully worldwide discussion, debates, and reforms... I want people to see the truth... because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public." Quotes from [an online chat](#) attributed to Bradley Manning

On 3 June the trial of PFC Bradley Manning finally begins. He will have spent over three years in prison. During his first year of incarceration the conditions Bradley was kept in amounted to torture and were condemned by the UN's special rapporteur on torture, Juan Mendez.

The American government has devoted great energy and resources to the [persecution of Bradley Manning](#) since his arrest in 2010 for releasing documents to WikiLeaks that exposed US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is all part of [President Obama's war on whistle blowers](#) that has led to his administration arresting more people under the 1917 espionage Act than all of the previous governments put together. Up to Obama taking office the US government had only prosecuted three whistle-blowers in 40 years. Now under Obama six people have/are being prosecuted for their whistle blowing activities.

The persecution of [John Kiriakou](#), a former CIA intelligence analyst, who was sentenced to two and half years in prison for exposing torture as official US policy sums up the attitude of Obama's government.

Obama's government is trying to send a very clear message to both servicemen and woman and those in the intelligence services. To those Americans he is saying don't you dare release any document that might be critical of US foreign policy or we will come after you and put you in prison for a very long time.

Of course, this is not the only target in Obama's sights. It is very clear from the pre-trial hearings that the military prosecutors want to send a message to journalists which is: if you have any contact with the enemies of America then you may be guilty of aiding the enemy and we will come after you also.

Journalist Alexa O'Brien has covered the Bradley Manning case from the start. As she points out, the persecution of Manning is one of the most important civil rights cases since 9/11. In [her blog](#) she commented, "At issue in the Manning trial is the danger posed to democracy and the rule of law by the government's expanding control over information in the digital age; and the use of prejudicial prosecutions that turn whistle-blowing into treason and

journalism into espionage or an act of war.”

It is not surprising that they have gone after Bradley Manning considering the revelations he allegedly made to WikiLeaks when he was serving in Iraq as an intelligence specialist. The documents released by WikiLeaks have opened a Pandora’s box of highly embarrassing and illegal activities committed by American forces. The [“Iraq War” logs](#) revealed that American armed forces routinely ignored the torture of suspects by the Iraqi security forces. Indeed, they often used torture themselves. They also revealed war crimes committed by American troops. The infamous video of an Apache attack helicopter shooting and killing 11 people in Baghdad in 2007 is probably the most famous revelation.

The [Afghan war logs](#) reveal a relentless catalogue of civilian killings by NATO forces, many of which are war crimes. Not surprisingly, most of these unlawful killings have not been investigated. The most infamous of which is the major scandal surrounding the NATO bombing of a village at Kunduz. This massacre of 140 Afghani civilians gained world wide media coverage at the time.

The military trial that Bradley Manning will receive will not be open and transparent. Military judge Denis Lind had ruled that some sections of the trial will be closed to the public to protect classified material. She has also ruled that the testimony of 24 of the 150 witnesses for the prosecution will be heard in closed sessions of the court.

On 22 May a group of prominent journalists, that includes Julian Assange, filed a lawsuit that tries to force military judge Denise Lind to grant the public and press access to transcripts of the trial proceedings, the government’s filings and court orders.

Center for Constitutional Rights Senior Attorney [Shayana Kadidal](#) has commented, “If this lawsuit fails, Manning’s trial will take place under conditions where journalists and the public will be unable as a practical matter to follow what is going on in the courtroom. That ensures that any verdict will be fundamentally unfair ...”

Amy Goodman of Democracy Now! is one of the journalists bringing the lawsuit against military judge Denis Lind. She has [warned](#):

“Secret trials are commonplace in dictatorships, but have no place in this country. The Obama administration conducts unconstitutional dragnet surveillance of journalists to uncover protected sources, and targets whistle blowers with unprecedented use of the espionage act. Access to court documents and proceedings in the court martial of Bradley Manning is vital to the public’s right to know to what lengths their government will go to keep secret their conduct of wars and occupations abroad.”

This is one of the the most important trials of the last decade yet it is largely ignored by the mainstream media in the US. Internationally support is growing for Bradley Manning. In the UK he was recently voted The [Guardian’s Person of the Year by readers](#).

In early December three [Nobel Peace Prize winners](#), Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mairead Maguire and Adolfo Perez Esquivel called upon the American people to stand up for the whistle-blower who has done so much to defend their democratic rights. Their letter of support for Bradley Manning concludes:

"We Nobel Peace Prize laureates condemn the persecution Bradley Manning has suffered, including imprisonment in conditions declared "cruel, inhuman and degrading" by the United Nations.... In the conflict in Iraq alone, more than 110,000 people have died since 2003, millions have been displaced and nearly 4,500 American soldiers have been killed. If Bradley Manning released the documents, as the prosecution contends, we should express to him our gratitude for his efforts toward accountability in government, informed democracy and peace".

[Daniel Ellsberg](#) who leaked the top secret Pentagon Papers in 1971, that exposed the destructive and immoral nature of America's war in Vietnam, has made an appeal for people all over the world to support Bradley Manning:

"We need money to support ongoing grass roots efforts—including rallies, petitions, and ads. Most importantly, however, we need to continue fully funding Bradley's legal defence efforts—including possible appeals, all the way up to the US Supreme Court, if need be. The future of truth-telling is at stake, and a young man's selfless, heroic act of patriotism deserves our support."

To learn more about Bradley Manning's case or to get involved, visit the Bradley Manning Support Network website.

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