

The Saga of Bradley Manning, Julian Assange, and Wikileaks, to be put to ballad and film

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Global Research, March 06, 2012

[The Anti-Empire Report](#) 6 March 2012

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

“Defense lawyers say Manning was clearly a troubled young soldier whom the Army should never have deployed to Iraq or given access to classified material while he was stationed there ... They say he was in emotional turmoil, partly because he was a gay soldier at a time when homosexuals were barred from serving openly in the U.S. armed forces.” (Associated Press, February 3)

It's unfortunate and disturbing that Bradley Manning's attorneys have chosen to consistently base his legal defense upon the premise that personal problems and shortcomings are what motivated the young man to turn over hundreds of thousands of classified government files to Wikileaks. They should not be presenting him that way any more than Bradley should be tried as a criminal or traitor. He should be hailed as a national hero. Yes, even when the lawyers are talking to the military mind. May as well try to penetrate that mind and find the freest and best person living there. Bradley also wears a military uniform.

Here are Manning's own words from an online chat: “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.”

Is the world to believe that these are the words of a disturbed and irrational person? Do not the Nuremberg Tribunal and the Geneva Conventions speak of a higher duty than blind loyalty to one's government, a duty to report the war crimes of that government?

Below is a listing of some of the things revealed in the State Department cables and Defense Department files and videos. For exposing such embarrassing and less-than-honorable behavior, Bradley Manning of the United States Army and Julian Assange of Wikileaks may spend most of their remaining days in a modern dungeon, much of it while undergoing that particular form of torture known as “solitary confinement”. Indeed, it has been suggested that the mistreatment of Manning has been for the purpose of making him testify against and implicating Assange. Dozens of members of the American media and public officials have called for Julian Assange's execution or assassination. Under the new National Defense Authorization Act, Assange could well be kidnaped or assassinated. What century are we living in? What world?

It was after seeing American war crimes such as those depicted in the video “Collateral Murder” and documented in the “Iraq War Logs,” made public by Manning and Wikileaks,

that the Iraqis refused to exempt US forces from prosecution for future crimes. The video depicts an American helicopter indiscriminately murdering several non-combatants in addition to two Reuters journalists, and the wounding of two little children, while the helicopter pilots cheer the attacks in a Baghdad suburb like it was the Army-Navy game in Philadelphia.

The insistence of the Iraqi government on legal jurisdiction over American soldiers for violations of Iraqi law — something the United States rarely, if ever, accepts in any of the many countries where its military is stationed — forced the Obama administration to pull the remaining American troops from the country.

If Manning had committed war crimes in Iraq instead of exposing them, he would be a free man today, as are the many hundreds/thousands of American soldiers guilty of truly loathsome crimes in cities like Haditha, Fallujah, and other places whose names will live in infamy in the land of ancient Mesopotamia.

Besides playing a role in writing *finis* to the awful Iraq war, the Wikileaks disclosures helped to spark the Arab Spring, beginning in Tunisia.

When people in Tunisia read or heard of US Embassy cables revealing the extensive corruption and decadence of the extended ruling family there — one long and detailed cable being titled: “CORRUPTION IN TUNISIA: WHAT’S YOURS IS MINE” — how Washington’s support of Tunisian President Ben Ali was not really strong, and that the US would not support the regime in the event of a popular uprising, they took to the streets.

Here is a sample of some of the other Wikileaks revelations that make the people of the world wiser:

- In 2009 Japanese diplomat Yukiya Amano became the new head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which plays the leading role in the investigation of whether Iran is developing nuclear weapons or is working only on peaceful civilian nuclear energy projects. A US embassy cable of October 2009 said Amano “took pains to emphasize his support for U.S. strategic objectives for the Agency. Amano reminded the [American] ambassador on several occasions that ... he was solidly in the U.S. court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program.”
- Russia refuted US claims that Iran has missiles that could target Europe.
- The British government’s official inquiry into how it got involved in the Iraq War was deeply compromised by the government’s pledge to protect the Bush administration in the course of the inquiry.
- A discussion between Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh and American Gen. David H. Petraeus in which Saleh indicated he would cover up the US role in missile strikes against al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Yemen. “We’ll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours,” Saleh told Petraeus.
- The US embassy in Madrid has had serious points of friction with the Spanish government and civil society: a) trying to get the criminal case dropped against three US soldiers accused of killing a Spanish television cameraman in Baghdad during a 2003 unprovoked US tank shelling of the hotel where he and other journalists were staying; b) torture cases brought by a Spanish NGO against six senior Bush administration officials, including former attorney general Alberto

Gonzales; c) a Spanish government investigation into the torture of Spanish subjects held at Guantánamo; d) a probe by a Spanish court into the use of Spanish bases and airfields for American extraordinary rendition (= torture) flights; e) continual criticism of the Iraq war by Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero, who eventually withdrew Spanish troops.

- State Department officials at the United Nations, as well as US diplomats in various embassies, were assigned to gather as much of the following information as possible about UN officials, including Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, permanent security council representatives, senior UN staff, and foreign diplomats: e-mail and website addresses, internet user names and passwords, personal encryption keys, credit card numbers, frequent flyer account numbers, work schedules, and biometric data. US diplomats at the embassy in Asunción, Paraguay were asked to obtain dates, times and telephone numbers of calls received and placed by foreign diplomats from China, Iran and the Latin American leftist states of Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. US diplomats in Romania, Hungary and Slovenia were instructed to provide biometric information on “current and emerging leaders and advisers” as well as information about “corruption” and information about leaders’ health and “vulnerability”. The UN directive also specifically asked for “biometric information on ranking North Korean diplomats”. A similar cable to embassies in the Great Lakes region of Africa said biometric data included DNA, as well as iris scans and fingerprints.
- A special “Iran observer” in the Azerbaijan capital of Baku reported on a dispute that played out during a meeting of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council. An enraged Revolutionary Guard Chief of Staff, Mohammed Ali Jafari, allegedly got into a heated argument with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and slapped him in the face because the generally conservative president had, surprisingly, advocated freedom of the press.
- The State Department, virtually alone in the Western Hemisphere, did not unequivocally condemn a June 28, 2009 military coup in Honduras, even though an embassy cable declared: “there is no doubt that the military, Supreme Court and National Congress conspired on June 28 in what constituted an illegal and unconstitutional coup against the Executive Branch”. US support of the coup government has been unwavering ever since.
- The leadership of the Swedish Social Democratic Party — neutral, pacifist, and liberal Sweden, so the long-standing myth goes — visited the US embassy in Stockholm and asked for advice on how best to sell the war in Afghanistan to a skeptical Swedish public, asking if the US could arrange for a member of the Afghan government to come visit Sweden and talk up NATO’s humanitarian efforts on behalf of Afghan children, and so forth. [For some years now Sweden has been, in all but name, a member of NATO and the persecutor of Julian Assange, the latter to please a certain Western power.]
- The US pushed to influence Swedish wiretapping laws so communication passing through the Scandinavian country could be intercepted. The American interest was clear: Eighty per cent of all the internet traffic from Russia travels through Sweden.
- President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy told US embassy officials in Brussels in January 2010 that no one in Europe believed in Afghanistan anymore. He said Europe was going along in deference to the United States and that there must be results in 2010, or “Afghanistan is over for Europe.”
- Iraqi officials saw Saudi Arabia, not Iran, as the biggest threat to the integrity

and cohesion of their fledgling democratic state. The Iraqi leaders were keen to assure their American patrons that they could easily “manage” the Iranians, who wanted stability; but that the Saudis wanted a “weak and fractured” Iraq, and were even “fomenting terrorism that would destabilize the government”. The Saudi King, moreover, wanted a US military strike on Iran.

- Saudi Arabia in 2007 threatened to pull out of a Texas oil refinery investment unless the US government intervened to stop Saudi Aramco from being sued in US courts for alleged oil price fixing. The deputy Saudi oil minister said that he wanted the US to grant Saudi Arabia sovereign immunity from lawsuits
- Saudi donors were the chief financiers of Sunni militant groups like Al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, and Lashkar-e-Taiba, which carried out the 2008 Mumbai attacks.
- Pfizer, the world’s largest pharmaceutical company, hired investigators to unearth evidence of corruption against the Nigerian attorney general in order to persuade him to drop legal action over a controversial 1996 drug trial involving children with meningitis.
- Oil giant Shell claimed to have “inserted staff” and fully infiltrated Nigeria’s government.
- The Obama administration renewed military ties with Indonesia in spite of serious concerns expressed by American diplomats about the Indonesian military’s activities in the province of West Papua, expressing fears that the Indonesian government’s neglect, rampant corruption and human rights abuses were stoking unrest in the region.
- US officials collaborated with Lebanon’s defense minister to spy on, and allow Israel to potentially attack, Hezbollah in the weeks that preceded a violent May 2008 military confrontation in Beirut.
- Gabon president Omar Bongo allegedly pocketed millions in embezzled funds from central African states, channeling some of it to French political parties in support of Nicolas Sarkozy.
- Cables from the US embassy in Caracas in 2006 asked the US Secretary of State to warn President Hugo Chávez against a Venezuelan military intervention to defend the Cuban revolution in the eventuality of an American invasion after Castro’s death.
- The United States was concerned that the leftist Latin American television network, Telesur, headquartered in Venezuela, would collaborate with al Jazeera of Qatar, whose coverage of the Iraq War had gotten under the skin of the Bush administration.
- The Vatican told the United States it wanted to undermine the influence of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez in Latin America because of concerns about the deterioration of Catholic power there. It feared that Chávez was seriously damaging relations between the Catholic church and the state by identifying the church hierarchy in Venezuela as part of the privileged class.
- The Holy See welcomed President Obama’s new outreach to Cuba and hoped for further steps soon, perhaps to include prison visits for the wives of the Cuban Five. Better US-Cuba ties would deprive Hugo Chávez of one of his favorite screeds and could help restrain him in the region.
- The wonderful world of diplomats: In 2010, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown raised with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton the question of visas for two wives of members of the “Cuban Five”. “Brown requested that the wives (who have previously been refused visas to visit the U.S.) be granted visas so that they

could visit their husbands in prison. ... Our subsequent queries to Number 10 indicate that Brown made this request as a result of a commitment that he had made to UK trade unionists, who form part of the Labour Party's core constituency. Now that the request has been made, Brown does not intend to pursue this matter further. There is no USG action required."

- UK Officials concealed from Parliament how the US was allowed to bring cluster bombs onto British soil in defiance of a treaty banning the housing of such weapons.
- A cable was sent by an official at the US Interests Section in Havana in July 2006, during the runup to the Non-Aligned Movement conference. He noted that he was actively looking for "human interest stories and other news that shatters the myth of Cuban medical prowess". [Presumably to be used to weaken support for Cuba amongst the member nations at the conference.]
- Most of the men sent to Guantánamo prison were innocent people or low-level operatives; many of the innocent individuals were sold to the US for bounty.
- DynCorp, a powerful American defense contracting firm that claims almost \$2 billion per year in revenue from US tax dollars, threw a "boy-play" party for Afghan police recruits. (Yes, it's what you think.)
- Even though the Bush and Obama Administrations repeatedly maintained publicly that there was no official count of civilian casualties, the Iraq and Afghanistan War Logs showed that this claim was untrue.
- Known Egyptian torturers received training at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia.
- The United States put great pressure on the Haitian government to not go ahead with various projects, with no regard for the welfare of the Haitian people. A 2005 cable stressed continued US insistence that all efforts must be made to keep former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, whom the United States had overthrown the previous year, from returning to Haiti or influencing the political process. In 2006, Washington's target was President René Préal for his agreeing to a deal with Venezuela to join Caracas's Caribbean oil alliance, PetroCaribe, under which Haiti would buy oil from Venezuela, paying only 60 percent up front with the remainder payable over twenty-five years at 1 percent interest. And in 2009, the State Department backed American corporate opposition to an increase in the minimum wage for Haitian workers, the poorest paid in the Western Hemisphere.
- The United States used threats, spying, and more to try to get its way at the crucial 2009 climate conference in Copenhagen.
- Mahmoud Abbas, president of The Palestinian National Authority, and head of the Fatah movement, turned to Israel for help in attacking Hamas in Gaza in 2007.
- The British government trained a Bangladeshi paramilitary force condemned by human rights organisations as a "government death squad".
- A US military order directed American forces not to investigate cases of torture of detainees by Iraqis.
- The US was involved in the Australian government's 2006 campaign to oust Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare.
- A 2009 US cable said that police brutality in Egypt against common criminals was routine and pervasive, the police using force to extract confessions from criminals on a daily basis.
- US diplomats pressured the German government to stifle the prosecution of CIA

operatives who abducted and tortured Khalid El-Masri, a German citizen. [El-Masri was kidnaped by the CIA while on vacation in Macedonia on December 31, 2003. He was flown to a torture center in Afghanistan, where he was beaten, starved, and sodomized. The US government released him on a hilltop in Albania five months later without money or the means to go home.]

- 2005 cable re “widespread severe torture” by India, the widely-renowned “world’s largest democracy”: The International Committee of the Red Cross reported: “The continued ill-treatment of detainees, despite longstanding ICRC-GOI [Government of India] dialogue, have led the ICRC to conclude that New Delhi condones torture.” Washington was briefed on this matter by the ICRC years ago. What did the United States, one of the world’s leading practitioners and teachers of torture in the past century, do about it? American leaders, including the present ones, continued to speak warmly of “the world’s largest democracy”; as if torture and one of the worst rates of poverty and child malnutrition in the world do not contradict the very idea of democracy.
- The United States overturned a ban on training the Indonesian Kopassus army special forces — despite the Kopassus’s long history of arbitrary detention, torture and murder — after the Indonesian President threatened to derail President Obama’s trip to the country in November 2010.
- Since at least 2006 the United States has been funding political opposition groups in Syria, including a satellite TV channel that beams anti-government programming into the country.

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William Blum is the author of:

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- *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*
- *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*
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