

Bradley Manning Court Martial Underway: Military Trial Threatens Basic American Freedom

The U.S. Has Set About to Lynch Bradley Manning

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The Bradley Manning court martial that began June 3 looks like another defining moment for America – another indication of whether we are becoming the nation of supine toadies our government wants, or whether we still have enough devotion to the common good to behave in ways as decent and risky as Bradley Manning.

The U.S. government is going to extraordinary lengths to persuade us that Private Bradley Manning, 25, is a dangerous enemy of the state.

Even though Manning pled guilty to 10 of 22 charges last March, the U.S. Government is going ahead with all its charges, without providing a credible rationale. One charge, under the 1913 Espionage Act, could carry the death penalty.



There is reasonable likelihood that the military judge presiding over Manning's military trial will agree with her government employer, find Manning guilty as charged, and sentence him to life in prison, or possibly death (even though the prosecution isn't seeking the death penalty, the judge might have the power to impose it).

At that point, if that's where it goes, there will no longer be any legal doubt that Manning is an enemy of the state.

And there will no longer be any moral doubt that the state, the U.S. government, is an enemy of the people.

Manning Exposed War Crimes That the Army Wanted Covered Up

This is not yet a widely shared perception, apparently, although there are many strong voices articulating it in a variety of forms, mostly in alternative media.

But what about the American people? What does public opinion polling show to be the public's opinion of Bradley Manning? An Associated Press piece filed from London June 4 begins, "It's rare for an American to generate more sympathy abroad than at home, but Bradley Manning and his trial [sic] are unique in a host of ways."

The AP report offers no basis for the conclusion about relative sympathy here and abroad, but a quick google search for public opinion polling about Bradley Manning turned up nothing. Further search of the websites of the Pew Research Center, Gallup, Zogby, Nate

Silver's 538, CNN, Ipsos/Reuters, Quinnipiac, and six other polling organizations also turned up nothing.

Apparently there has been NO significant polling of the public on one of the more significant public issues of the day. Is that because the public doesn't care (how would we know?)?

The Questions That Are NOT Asked Also Affect Public Opinion

Or do polling companies have some agenda on the issue? Framing a neutral polling question poses a serious challenge. And in any event, why ask questions about a subject the government would just as soon as few people thought about as possible?

If people did think about Bradley Manning and what he's done, there's always the possibility that, like readers of the Guardian in the U.K. in 2011, they might vote for him to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for exposing American war crimes and slowing American wars, at least in the Middle East. Manning got 39.4% of that vote, followed by Julian Assange of Wikileaks with 18.9%, and Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar (Burma) with 11.3%, the peace activist who won the prize in 1991.

Roots Action has a current online petition to award the peace prize to Manning. With a goal of 75,000 signatures, the petition had 59,595 signers by June 5.

Presumably the U.S. government prosecuting Manning wants to do what it can from

becoming a popular hero or noble martyr – someone others might emulate. His treatment since May 2010 is consistent with a determined effort to diminish or break him, holding him in isolation in conditions that were “cruel, inhuman, and degrading” according to a United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture.

What Did the People Know, and When Did They Know It?

Maybe a polling question could be: Do you believe it's constitutional for the U.S. Army to torture one of its own soldiers because he revealed the truth about U.S. war crimes to the American people?

Like the void in polling, mainstream media coverage has been thin and frequently counterfactual to the point of resembling government propaganda. For example, anchor Brian Williams framed the story this way on the NBC Nightly News on June 3:

“The court martial of the man who may have put U.S. military secrets in the hands of Osama bin Laden started today, the so-called WikiLeaks trial.”

This is, indeed, the prosecution's point of view, but there is as yet no persuasive showing that there were any militarily useful secrets, or that they got into the hands of Osama bin Laden. For major networks to call it the “Wikileaks trial,” is misleading, since Wikileaks is not on trial – but it is, very likely, targeted by the U.S. government.

ABC News gave a similarly slanted, 15 second report on the trial, headlined: “Bradley Manning Wikileaks Trial Begins.” The Drudge report just calls the whole thing “Wiktrial.”

Detailed comment on mainstream media coverage, its failings and biases, is available from FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, fair.org) on the FAIR blog.

This Military Trial Threatens Basic American Freedom

Writing in the New York Times on March 13, celebrated First Amendment lawyer Floyd Abrams said in an op-ed column, in reference to the Manning case:

“And what could be more destructive to an informed citizenry than the threat of the death penalty or life imprisonment without parole for whistle-blowers?”

Abrams, who represented the Times in successfully defending the paper’s constitutional right to publish the Pentagon Papers in 1971, was arguing that Manning’s guilty plea to a set of charges that could put him in prison for 20 years should be sufficient for the government’s needs:

“Private Manning’s guilty plea gives the prosecution an opportunity to rethink its strategy. The extreme charges remaining in this case create a severe threat to future whistle-blowers, even when their revelations are crystal-clear instances of whistle-blowing. We cannot allow our concerns about terrorism to turn us into a country where communicating with the press can be prosecuted as a capital offense.”

This was Abrams’ final paragraph, one that the government obviously ignored. It is a measure of Abrams’ timidity – and the pallid coverage the Times has given the Manning case – that he introduces “our concerns about terrorism” to blur the issue.

If there was terrorism in the well-known helicopter killing video, it was the effort by Americans to gun down children sitting in the front seat of a civilian van that was serving as a make-shift ambulance responding to the earlier carnage Americans had wrought on non-threatening civilians, killing twelve, including three journalists.

The video of this event on July 12, 2007, is called “Collateral Murder” by Wikileaks and can be found online on YouTube, on The World Can’t Wait, and other websites.

If this were actually a free country, then we would be able, at a minimum, to watch the court martial of Bradley Manning, live, on C-SPAN.

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