

‘Unfathomable Evil Recognizing Unfathomable Evil’: Trump’s Possible Pardons of War Criminals Provoke Outrage

"If you were to make a list of 'top notorious U.S. war crimes of the post-9/11 era' it would look a lot like the president's pardoning plans."

By [Jessica Corbett](#)

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Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

*Progressives, human rights advocates, and journalists responded with outrage on Saturday to a New York Times [report](#) that **President Donald Trump** “has requested the immediate preparation of paperwork needed to pardon several American military members accused or convicted of war crimes.”*

Unnamed U.S. government officials told the *Times* that on or around Memorial Day, Trump may pardon multiple servicemembers involved with “high-profile cases of murder, attempted murder, and desecration of a corpse.”

As the newspaper reported:

The requests are for Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher of the Navy SEALs, who is scheduled to stand trial in the coming weeks on charges of [shooting unarmed civilians](#) and killing an enemy captive with a knife while deployed in Iraq.

They are also believed to include the case of a former [Blackwater security contractor](#) recently found guilty in the deadly 2007 shooting of dozens of unarmed Iraqis; the case of Maj. Mathew L. Golsteyn, the Army Green Beret accused of [killing an unarmed Afghan](#) in 2010; and the case of a [group of Marine Corps snipers](#) charged with urinating on the corpse of a dead Taliban fighter.

“These are all extremely complicated cases that have gone through a careful system of consideration,” **Gary Solis**, a retired military judge and armor officer who served in Vietnam, told the *Times*. “A freewheeling pardon undermines that whole system.”

Solis warned that pardoning servicemembers accused or convicted of war crimes “raises the prospect in the minds of the troops that says, ‘Whatever we do, if we can get the folks back home behind us, maybe we can get let off.’”

The news on Saturday came after Trump, earlier this month, [pardoned](#) former Army 1st Lt. **Michael Behenna**, who was convicted of murdering an Iraqi prisoner in 2008. As *Common Dreams* [reported](#) at the time, human rights advocates decried that decision as “a presidential endorsement of a murder that violated the military’s own code of justice.”

The *Times* report—on which the White House and Justice Department declined to comment—was met with similar condemnation.

The Atlantic's Adam Serwer, who [spoke out against](#) Trump's pardon of Behenna, tweeted,

"This incentivizes the commission of war crimes by our opponents and allies, and in doing so puts U.S. servicemembers at greater risk."

Gonna say this again—this incentivizes the commission of war crimes by our opponents and allies, and in doing so puts US servicemembers at greater risk. <https://t.co/jsEmw7UHn8>

— Adam Serwer (@AdamSerwer) [May 18, 2019](#)

Human Rights Watch executive director **Ken Roth** said,

"Think of the horrible message that sends to would-be war criminals around the world."

Trump is threatening to pardon US military members accused or convicted of killing civilians and other war crimes. Think of the horrible message that sends to would-be war criminals around the world. <https://t.co/yEsDAfR8IX>

— Kenneth Roth (@KenRoth) [May 18, 2019](#)

Murtaza Mohammad Hussain, a reporter at *The Intercept*, denounced Trump's expected move as "a huge injustice to those whose lives they destroyed and a message that America will tolerate war crimes."

Trump is getting ready to pardon some of America's most horrifying recent war criminals. A huge injustice to those whose lives they destroyed and a message that America will tolerate war crimes: <https://t.co/2uBwqa6sDy> [pic.twitter.com/5TloLVJgXH](https://t.co/2uBwqa6sDy)

— Murtaza Mohammad Hussain (@MazMHussain) [May 18, 2019](#)

Their criticism was echoed by others, including journalist **Ryan Devereaux**, who suggested that

"if you were to make a list of 'top notorious U.S. war crimes of the post-9/11 era' it would look a lot like the president's pardoning plans."

If you were to make a list of "top notorious U.S. war crimes of the post-9/11 era" it would look a lot like the president's pardoning plans — literal murderers' row <https://t.co/ykuftZh8EU>

— Ryan Devereaux (@rdevro) [May 18, 2019](#)

Who pardons war criminals? DICTATORS. What is the signal you give by doing this? No amount of violence whether at home or abroad will be punished; no one will be held accountable. <https://t.co/qU6kvQUZnZ>

— Jodi Jacobson (@jljacobson) [May 18, 2019](#)

Fuck this. Unfathomable evil recognizing unfathomable evil. <https://t.co/cwfryocl9t>

— Scott Tobias (@scott_tobias) [May 18, 2019](#)

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