

Hearing Bradley Manning

Daniel Ellsberg

Daniel Ellsberg, whistleblower extraordinaire, has launched a new organisation to protect the freedom of the press, including the journalists of Wikileaks. Here, with an insider's insight, he assesses Bradley Manning's courageous stand.

◀ *Support in Kabul for Bradley Manning's stand against war crimes, March 2013.*

The Freedom of the Press Organisation, an organization that I co-founded and of which I'm on the board, has published an audio recording of Bradley Manning's speech to a military court, in which he gives his reasons and motivations behind leaking over 700,000 government documents to WikiLeaks.

Whoever made this recording, and I don't know who the person is, has done the American public a great service. This marks the first time the American public can hear Bradley Manning, in his own voice explain what he did and how he did it. After listening to this recording and reading his testimony, I believe Bradley Manning is the personification of the word whistleblower.

Manning faces some of exact same charges I faced forty-two years ago when I leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times* and eighteen other papers. The only difference is I was a civilian, so I could stay out of jail on bond while the trial was going on, and was able to talk to the media throughout. I took responsibility for what I had done on the day of my arrest, and I was able to explain why I did it.

But thanks to the judge's rulings in Manning's case, the public has barely heard anything from Manning at all. No official transcripts of the proceeding are released to the public, and when documents like the judge's court orders are released, it is weeks after the fact – and only in response to a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.

Now I hope the American people can see Manning in a different light. In 1971, I was able to give the media my side of the story, and it is long overdue Manning is able to do the same. As Manning has now done, I stipulated as to all the facts for which I was

accused. And I did that for several reasons, and I suspect that Manning had the same motives.

First, it was to exonerate a number of people who were suspected of helping me, like former Defense Department colleagues Mort Halperin, Leslie Gelb and others. I was able to state flatly they did not know about the release in the midst of President Nixon's anxious desire to indict several of them.

And Manning, in saying he took responsibility for the leaks and describing in great detail how he did it, was able to say Julian Assange and Wikileaks had nothing to do with his decision to leak. WikiLeaks had not given him any special means beyond what a normal newspaper would do.

Now, there's really now excuse for the grand jury chasing Julian Assange for conspiracy to commit espionage to continue. If they're not going to indict the *New York Times* – and there is no constitutional basis for them to do so – there's no reason for them to investigate or indict Assange or WikiLeaks.

As the former general counsel of the *New York Times*, James Goodale, once said, 'Charging Julian Assange with "conspiracy to commit espionage" would effectively be setting a precedent with a charge that more accurately could be characterized as "conspiracy to commit journalism".'

The second thing Manning did with his statement – which you can finally hear online – was to explain his motives (he could not do that while he was still putting the responsibility on the government – by pleading not guilty – to prove what he had done beyond a reasonable doubt).

They were the same motives I felt 42 years ago. We both felt the horror of reading about deceptive, and even criminal, activity. We both felt the public needed this information and should have had it years ago. So we both released classified documents about a bloody, hopeless war.

Such criminal, dangerous, and deceptive behaviour by the government can only be changed if Congress and the public are informed of them. And when official secrecy allows the government to cover these facts up, the only way to bring them to the public is to break secrecy regulations.

Some of the most critical documents leaked by Manning revealed torture by the Iraqi government, which the US knew about, and according to the international treaty on torture, the US should have required investigations. In fact, the Iraq war logs show hundreds of instances of cases of torture, and in every case, the soldiers were given the illegal order not to investigate.

In his statement to the court, Manning talks about an incident where he thought men who were apprehended shouldn't have been, and that they were being handed over to the Iraqis to possibly be tortured. He went to

his superior and was told to forget about it. Bradley Manning, by releasing this information, is the only soldier who actually obeyed this law, the international treaty, and by extension, the Constitution.

Manning was discriminating

Critics have alleged that a major difference between my case and Manning's is that I was discriminating in what I leaked, while Manning wasn't. He just dumped some material that doesn't need to be out, they say. This is simply false.

First, it's important to point out most of the material he put out was unclassified. The rest was classified 'secret,' which is relatively low level. All of the Pentagon Papers were classified top secret. But, in a fact no one seems to observe from his statement, Manning was working within a 'SCIF', which stands for Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility. To get into a SCIF, a soldier needs a clearance higher than top secret. This means he had access to the highest classified material, such as communications and signals intelligence. This means he could've put out information top secret and higher, and purposely chose not to do so.

Aiding the enemy

It's important to remember through all this that Manning has already pleaded guilty to ten charges of violating military regulations (few of which, if any, would be civilian crimes) and faces twenty years in jail. Yet the prosecutors are still going ahead with the absurd charge of 'aiding the enemy', a capital offense, of which the prosecutors are asking for life in prison.

Nixon could have brought that charge against me, too. I was revealing wrongdoing by our government in a public way, and that information could have been read by our enemies in Vietnam. Of course, I never had that intent, and Manning didn't either. We both leaked information to provoke a domestic debate about military force and government secrecy. And to say we did so to aid the enemy is absurd.

This charge could have huge effects on the free speech of anyone in the military and journalists across the country. Any op-ed that is critical of military tactics or any news story that exposes misdeeds of the government can potentially lead to a capital offence. Worse, the charge purports to apply to anyone, not just the military. It's blatantly unconstitutional.

Peace Prize

For the third straight year, Manning has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by, among others, Tunisian parliamentarians. Given the role

the WikiLeaks cables played in the Arab Spring, and their role in speeding up the end of the Iraq War, I can think of no one more deserving of the peace prize.

He's also deserving of the Congressional Medal of Honor. This medal, awarded by Congress – and not the executive branch – is given to military personnel, who during wartime, do what they should do for their country and their comrades, at the greatest risk to themselves.

Of course, there have been many who have shown great courage on the battlefield in Afghanistan and Iraq. But some have noted that we don't have the named heroes of the kind we did during World War One and World War Two, such as Sergeant York or Audie Murphy.

I see a hero in these wars whose example should inspire others. His name is Bradley Manning.

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