

Saving Private Manning

by Kellie Tranter and Bruce Haigh via stele - ABC (Oz) *Sunday, Dec 26 2010, 8:43pm*
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(We CONTINUE to support PFC Manning -- American ingrates, take note!)

Private First Class Bradley Manning, is the person being held in detention at Quantico Marine Base in Virginia, for allegedly releasing 260,000 confidential US government cables to WikiLeaks.

Reports confirm that he is being held in solitary confinement; that he only has one hour outside his cell a day; is on suicide watch and has no access to news.

Did Manning act alone? It seems unlikely. Remember Abu Graib - privates made scapegoats for senior administration figures?

The fear is that the US will apply a range of methods, including coercive pressure, such as water boarding and/or blandishments such as a promise of sentence reduction or waiver, in order to extract a confession from Manning that Assange set him up as his agent of supply. The United States has applied this type of pressure in the not too distant past in order to extract 'confessions'. Will we see a repeat with Manning?

Virginia is the headquarters of the Pentagon, Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Homeland Security. Assange's lawyer, Mark Stephens, has warned that the US has convened a secret federal grand jury. Will a grand jury include people employed by or with family connections to the US national security apparatus? The death penalty is a feature of Virginian law. The stage is set.

Does our government and media realise this, or even care?

The United States surely wouldn't be game, would it?

Now the case needs to be built. Federal prosecutors are looking for any evidence that Assange conspired with Manning or somehow was an accessory before the fact. They want to prove he was more than a passive recipient of the documents. Did Assange encourage Manning to extract classified military and State Department files from a government computer system?

Without seeking to help the US construct its case, the problem for us is how would Assange have been able to identify Manning as a possible source of information, deep as he was in the bowels of the US defence department? Assange, even at that time, had a significant public profile, it is far more plausible that Manning contacted Assange and in which case it was not about arranging a game of squash but to sound out Assange on the material that Manning had access to and was capable of downloading.

The New York Times has already noted that "By bringing a case against Mr Assange as a conspirator the government would not have to confront awkward questions about why it was not prosecuting traditional news organisations or journalists who also disclosed information the government said should be kept secret...."

US Attorney General Eric Holder has said, "...I don't want to get into specifics here, but people would have a misimpression if the only statute you think that we are looking at is the Espionage Act... That is certainly something that might play a role, but there are other statutes, other tools that we have at our disposal...."

The problem with any US "investigation" like this - for which "witch hunt" may be a more accurate description - is the patterns of behaviour to be found in recent American history.

There is a record of secret support for less than salubrious regimes with undeclared involvement for example in the overthrow of Chilean president Allende, secret support for drug running Panamanian president General Noriega, the corrupt Marcos family in the Phillipines, Ngo Dinh Diem, General Thieu and Air Vice Marshall Ky in South Vietnam and more recently Karzai in Afghanistan: a further quick sampling would highlight the McCarthy witch hunt of "communists" in the 1950s, the Gulf of Tonkin incident staged to justify the war in Vietnam, the invasion of Afghanistan that hinged on blaming the [Taliban] government for 9/11, and assertions about non-existent "weapons of mass destruction" to justify the invasion of Iraq.

Successive US administrations have been prepared to cook the books to get the results they want; supporting officials have at times been loose with the truth or have sought to subvert and suppress it. Investigations have all too often been designed to achieve desired outcomes, and a well oiled propaganda machine feeds a substantially complicit media with selective pieces of "evidence" in attempts to keep the public duped and supportive. [Emphasis added]

Why hasn't the US signed up to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court? What do they fear? Why should we look at America acceptingly, instead of in the same critical light that we bring to bear on China, Russia, Japan, North Korea and Iran. We need to ignore the public relations spin and judge the US by what it actually does, not on what it says.

The more the United States overreacts the more it undermines its own prestige. Blustering and bullying reveals neither maturity nor power warranting respect, but ruthlessness and blind vindictiveness. It demonstrated how much it values fairness, objective truth and due process when, unable to produce any actual evidence of legal wrongdoing by Assange or WikiLeaks, it goes in via the back door to clobber them by putting the weights on US multinational financial corporations to cut off the money supply.

What will be the next installment - a full and frank confession by Manning? A confession that stitches up the gaps to provide a 'water tight case' against Assange that makes Swedish and British authorities feel compelled to allow his extradition to the US? How long will it take to fit up Manning when he has already been in custody for 6 months?

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