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# Free Bradley Manning and put war on trial instead

John Dear | Jun. 4, 2013 On the Road to Peace

As the long trial of Bradley Manning gets underway this week, I want to add my voice to the millions who stand with him and the thousands who protested his imprisonment over the weekend in thanking him for his brave act and urging that all charges against him be dropped. Releasing information on war crimes, as the saying goes, is not a war crime. He should be released immediately.

Manning faces decades, perhaps life, in prison for allegedly leaking a video of a U.S. helicopter attack that killed at least 11 Iraqi civilians to WikiLeaks. Two Reuters reporters were killed and at least two children severely wounded. Manning is also suspected of leaking tens of thousands of U.S. reports about its war in Afghanistan, explicitly describing civilian deaths and cover-ups, corrupt officials, and U.S. collusion with warlords.

Manning was horrified by the killing of civilians and believed war crimes were being covered up, so he took action. That does not make him a war criminal.

"I believed that if the general public, especially the American public, had access to the information?...?this could spark a domestic debate on the role of the military and our foreign policy in general," Manning said in court, according to the *Financial Times* [1].

"I felt I accomplished something that would allow me to have a clear conscience," he testified in February [2].

President George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, President Barack Obama and their colleagues, not Manning, should stand trial as war criminals. War itself should be on trial.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. killed hundreds of thousands of people, including civilians and children, and violated international law, yet the military establishment plans to throw the book at this 25-year-old private who took action to expose the truth of our killings.

The military media propaganda machine is stirring up many lies about Manning. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called the effect of WikiLeaks' releases on U.S. foreign relations "modest." There is no evidence it hurt anyone.

Meanwhile, Manning's treatment in prison was unconscionable. In a February 2012 report to the United Nations [3], Juan Méndez, the UN's special rapporteur on torture, wrote Manning was in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day and practically tortured for his first 11 months of incarceration before being moved to Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Méndez said he was not allowed a private, unmonitored meeting with Manning, but after a 14-month investigation, he said [4] the Obama administration's treatment of Manning was cruel and inhuman.

"The Special Rapporteur concludes that imposing seriously punitive conditions of detention on someone who has not been found guilty of any crime is a violation of his right to physical and psychological integrity as well as of his presumption of innocence," Mendez wrote in his 2012 report.

Daniel Ellsberg, who faced life in prison four decades ago for releasing the Pentagon Papers exposing U.S. war crimes in Southeast Asia, has been speaking out diligently on Manning's behalf. I think we should listen to Ellsberg's assessment [5]:

> 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 behavior 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.

Ellsberg also penned a letter supporting Manning [6] for a website in favor of Manning's release:

> In releasing documents and videos to the anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks, PFC Manning made an enormously positive impact on world events. He revealed the terrifying misdeeds by American and coalition forces, such as the 2007 Baghdad airstrike that targeted and killed at least 12 Iraqi civilians. He opened a new pathway for truth and justice to reach the world, perhaps preventing the next unjust war from ever beginning. He even helped inspire a new, global movement for openness and democracy, ringing out from Tahrir Square to Wall Street. To me, and many others, Bradley is a hero.

What can we do to support Bradley Manning? For starters, we can join the Bradley Manning Support Network [6]. We can pray every day during this trial for Bradley Manning for his release, for new breakthroughs of truth for peace, and for an end to our wars. We can write letters of support to him c/o: Commander, HHC USAG; Attn: PFC Bradley Manning; 239 Sheridan Ave., Bldg 417; JBM-HH, VA 22211.

In particular, I wish churchgoers and churches would speak out on behalf of Bradley Manning. He has taken the strongest stand possible against war and paid with his freedom. He needs our prayer and vocal support.

We might recall that the nonviolent Jesus did not bless war, killing or injustice. He always sided with children and the victims of empire and spoke truth to power. Jesus himself resisted the imperial system of greed and violence and was arrested, tried and executed as a threat to empire. That's why I think every Christian who dares to follow the nonviolent Jesus should side with Bradley Manning -- and Julian Assange -- in his campaign to expose war crimes. We, too, need to denounce our war crimes, help stop the killings, resist this culture of war, try to relieve unjust suffering, care for the earth, and help make peace with humanity. Change usually comes through a nonviolent grass-roots movement that demands change.

The truth will set you free, Jesus taught. We can be grateful to Bradley Manning, for he has showed us the truth about ourselves and what is being done in our names. Let's hope his fearless act of truth and conscience will wake us up to put an end to the crime of war.

May the God of peace bless Bradley Manning, everyone in the court, the press and the military, the people of Afghanistan and Iraq, and all of us, that we might learn the truth and welcome the freedom of peace and nonviolence.

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To see John's speaking schedule for 2013 or to invite him to speak in your church or school, go to John Dear's website [7]. John is now working with the Francsican-based peace group Pace e Bene [8]. He is profiled in *Doing Time for Peace* *[9]* by Rosalie Reigle and with Dan Berrigan and Roy Bourgeois in *Divine Rebels* [10] by Deena Guzder. John's book *Lazarus, Come Forth!* [11] and other recent books, including *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* [12], *Put Down Your Sword* [13] and *A Persistent Peace* [14], are available from Amazon.com.

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