

Private [Bradley] Manning's Confidant

by Bill Keller via stacey - NYT *Monday, Mar 11 2013, 9:49pm*

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The following apologetic editorial piece by CEO of the NYT and CFR puppet, Bill Keller, is primarily compensating for his failure as a journalist and his social and moral failure to rally behind a brave young man that has reported heinous war and other crimes against humanity committed by the US military -- without 'fear or favour' Bill, REMEMBER?



Bill Keller

In early 2010, Pfc. Bradley Manning methodically uploaded a digital mother lode of classified United States military and diplomatic documents to the Internet insurgents of WikiLeaks. As everyone knows, WikiLeaks made these secret archives available to a few major news outlets, including this one. Many illuminating and troubling stories were published, and Washington has been gnashing its teeth ever since.

The founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, is, as far as we know, still hiding out in Ecuador's embassy in London, afraid that he might be extradited for his part in this hemorrhage of secrets, though the only allegations outstanding against him involve accusations of sex crimes in Sweden. Meanwhile, Manning, a 25-year-old low-level intelligence geek, is in pretrial hearings at Fort Meade, Md. He has pleaded guilty to crimes carrying up to 20 years of prison time, and the government is piling on more charges, including Article 104 of the military code, "aiding the enemy," which could get him life without parole.

In his statement to the military court, Manning said that before he fell in with the antisecrecy guerrillas at WikiLeaks, he tried to deliver his trove of stolen documents to The Washington Post and The New York Times. At The Post, he was put off when a reporter told him that before she could commit to anything she'd have to get a senior editor involved. At The Times, Manning said, he left a message on voice mail but never got a call back. It's puzzling to me that a skilled techie capable of managing one of the most monumental leaks ever couldn't figure out how to get an e-mail or phone message to an editor or a reporter at The Times, a feat scores of readers manage every day.

But what if he had? What if he had succeeded in delivering his pilfered documents to The Times? What would be different, for Manning and the rest of us?

First of all, I can say with some confidence that The Times would have done exactly what it did with

the archive when it was supplied to us via WikiLeaks: assigned journalists to search for material of genuine public interest, taken pains to omit information that might get troops in the field or innocent informants killed, and published our reports with a flourish. The documents would have made news — big news.

But somewhat less of it. While in reality The Times and the public benefited from a collegial partnership with London's Guardian and other papers that took part in the WikiLeaks fiesta, I'm pretty sure that if we had been the sole recipient we would not have shared Manning's gift with other news organizations. That is partly for competitive reasons, but also because sharing a treasury of raw intelligence, especially with foreign news media, might have increased the legal jeopardy for The Times and for our source. So our exclusive would have been a coup for The Times, but something would have been lost. By sharing the database widely — including with a range of local news outlets that mined the material for stories of little interest to a global news operation — WikiLeaks got much more mileage out of the secret cables than we would have done.

If Manning had connected with The Times, we would have found ourselves in a relationship with a nervous, troubled, angry young Army private who was offering not so much documentation of a particular government outrage as a chance to fish in a sea of secrets. Having never met Manning (he was in custody by the time we got the WikiLeaks documents), I can only guess what that relationship would have been like. Complicated. Probably tense. We would, of course, have honored any agreement to protect his identity, though Manning was not so good at covering his own tracks. (He spilled the story of his leaking in long instant-messenger chats with an ex-hacker, who turned him in.) Once he was arrested, we'd surely have editorialized against the brutality of his solitary confinement — as The Times has already done — and perhaps protested the disturbing overkill of the "aiding the enemy" charge. (If Manning's leak provided comfort to the enemy, then so does every news story about cuts in defense spending, or opposition to drone strikes, or setbacks in Afghanistan.) Beyond that, we'd have made sure Manning knew upfront that he was on his own, as we did with the last leaker of this magnitude, Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers fame.

"When the government moved to prosecute Ellsberg, we felt no obligation to assist him," Max Frankel, who was The Times's Washington bureau chief at the time, recalled the other day. "He was committing an act of civil disobedience and presumably knew that required accepting the punishment. We were privately pleased that the prosecution overreached and failed, but we did not consider ourselves his partner in any way."

The most important thing that would not be much different if The Times had been his outlet would be Manning's legal liability. The law provides First Amendment protection for a free press, but not for those who take an oath to protect government secrets. This administration has a particular, chilling intolerance for leakers — and digital footprints make them easier to catch these days — but I can't imagine that any administration would have hesitated to prosecute Manning.

But if Manning had been our direct source, the consequences might have been slightly mitigated. Although as a matter of law I believe WikiLeaks and The New York Times are equally protected by the First Amendment, it's possible the court's judgment of the leaker might be colored by the fact that he delivered the goods to a group of former hackers with an outlaw sensibility and an antipathy toward American interests. Will that cost Manning at sentencing time? I wonder. And it might explain the piling on of maximum charges. During pretrial, the judge, Col. Denise Lind, asked whether the prosecution would be pressing the same charges if Manning had leaked to The Times. "Yes, Ma'am," was the reply. Maybe so. But I suspect the fact that Manning chose the anti-establishment WikiLeaks as his collaborator made the government more eager to add on that dubious charge of "aiding the enemy."

If Manning had delivered his material to The Times, WikiLeaks would not have been able to post the unedited cables, as it ultimately did, heedless of the risk to human rights advocates, dissidents and informants named therein. In fact, you might not have heard of WikiLeaks. The group has had other middling scoops, but Manning put it on the map.

And, finally, if he had dealt with The Times, maybe we would better understand Bradley Manning. Lionized by WikiLeaks and his fan base as a whistle-blower and martyr, cast by his prosecutors as a villainous traitor, he has become dueling caricatures. Until the court proceedings, the only window into Manning's psyche was the voluminous transcript of his online chats with the ex-hacker, Adrian Lamo, published by Wired magazine. It portrays a young man, in his own words, "emotionally fractured" — a gay man in an institution not hospitable to gays, fragile, lonely, a little pleased with his own cleverness, a little vague about his motives. His political views come across as inchoate. When asked, he has trouble recalling any specific outrages that needed exposing. His cause was "open diplomacy" or — perhaps in jest — "worldwide anarchy."

At Fort Meade, Manning delivered a more coherent explanation of what drove him. Appalled by the human collateral damage of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, he says, he set out to "document the true cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan." Intrigued by his reading of State Department cables, he felt a need to let taxpayers in on the "backdoor deals and seemingly criminal activity" that are the dark underside of diplomacy. Was this sense of mission there from the start, or was it shaped afterward by the expectations of the Free Bradley Manning enthusiasts? The answer would probably make no difference to the court. But it might help determine history's verdict.

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