

Shedding Light on the Secret Pre-Trial of Bradley Manning

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With the threat of life in prison and the ideal of government transparency looming heavily in the background, Pfc. Bradley Manning's hired defense attorney and attorneys representing WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange pressed the military court to release key discovery evidence, legal documents and motions in the case against Manning as pre-trial hearings were held at Fort Meade in Maryland this week.

In rulings on Tuesday and Wednesday, Army judge Col. Denise Lind ordered key government "damage assessments" of the leaks to be turned over the court for review by May 18, but she threw out a motion to intervene that requested all Manning court-martial documents be released to the public.

Manning, a 24-year-old former military intelligence analyst, is accused of orchestrating the largest government leak in history: handing over at least 700,000 military files from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and US diplomatic documents over to WikiLeaks, which began publishing the leaks last year. The leaks gave the global public an in-depth look into the brutal realities of war and American diplomacy worldwide.

Manning is facing 22 counts, including aiding the enemy, theft of public records and transmitting defense information. Manning could serve life in prison if found guilty of aiding the enemy.

The government has so far refused to provide key pieces of evidence against him to his defense team, a process known as discovery. Several pre-trial meetings between prosecutors and Manning's defense were also held behind closed doors and out of public light. Court orders and motions are currently held secret despite complaints lodged by the [Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#) and the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) on behalf of Assange.

CCR attorney Shane Kadidal told Truthout that he was surprised by the lack of media presence at the hearings. Kadidal said that if it was in the government's interest to diminish media attention, then cutting off the flow of interesting information - such as court documents - is more effective than a complete blackout, which would peek reporters' interest.

Of key interest to the defense are "damage assessments" prepared by the CIA and the Departments of Justice, State and Defense. These assessments are thought to show that the leak did little harm to the US and would help the defense show that Manning did not aid America's enemies.

Colonel Lind threw out a motion from the defense to drop the 22 charges against Manning due to the mishandling of discovery, which Manning's defense attorney David Coombs argued set the defense's case back months if not years.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters this week that the leak of US diplomatic documents caused "enormous turbulence" in several diplomatic relationships.

Prosecutors have said the damage assessments are classified and not under their control. Lind, however, ordered that the assessments be turned over by May 18. Lind will decide if the defense gets to see them.

Coombs also filed a motion to release documents pertaining to a grand jury investigation on whether Assange could face criminal charges in the US.

In a sort of protest against the court's secrecy, Coombs posted all of the defense motions on a blog, although they had to be [heavily redacted](#).

Coombs is Manning's hired defense attorney paid by his supporters around the globe.

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