



Is Manning's Prolonged Isolation Torture?

[Lt. Col. \(ret.\) David Coombs](#), an Iraq War veteran and Army JAG who retired from active duty in 2009, [represents Manning](#). Coombs claims that Manning has been placed on suicide watch for two days last week, even though the jail's forensic psychiatrist disagreed with the designation. The government counters that the recommendation to put Manning on suicide watch was "based on input from more than one person." But the lack of specific reasons for the suicide watch trouble Coombs. "The fact that they won't articulate any basis for it leaves you with no other conclusion than it must be punitive," Coombs [told](#) the *Washington Post*. Manning had already been prohibited from contact with other prisoners and given only limited contact with his lawyer and a friend on occasional weekends.



Coombs' allegations of singling Manning out for punitive treatment before his (as yet, unscheduled) trial was [corroborated](#) by the only other independent person allowed to see Manning during his six-month long detention, MIT computer researcher David House. House claimed in December that Manning "has been held in the brig at Quantico Marine Corps Base for five months in inhumane conditions" largely because he is "confined under a longstanding Prevention of Injury (POI) order which limits his social contact, news consumption, ability to exercise, and that places restrictions on his ability to sleep. Manning has been living under the solitary restrictions of POI for five months despite being cleared by a military psychologist earlier this year, and despite repeated calls from his attorney David Coombs to lift the severely restrictive and isolating order."

House notes that POI orders are usually short-term, mainly because long-term isolation can be psychologically damaging to prisoners. It's largely because of this well-researched psychological damage that the [Geneva Conventions limit isolation to 30 days](#).

House claims that the purpose of the five-month POI is to "break" Manning psychologically, which may retroactively justify the suicide watch conditions. "Over the course of my visits to see Bradley in Quantico," House [wrote](#) on his blog, "it's become increasingly clear that the severe, inhumane conditions of his detention are wearing on Manning. The extraordinary restrictions of Manning's basic rights to sleep, exercise, and communicate under the Prevention of Injury order are unnecessary and should be lifted immediately."

Manning entered military custody in Iraq with extreme stress, if the Internet chats he is alleged to have had with former computer hacker Adrian Lamo are genuine. Excerpts of the chats have been released independently by different media sources (but not verified by government sources). They reveal a man who was under a lot of stress, "self-medicating" for the stress, and a convinced atheist who nevertheless



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on January 24, 2011

had a strong belief in absolute right and wrong. Manning claimed to be self-medicating in this [entry](#):

(1:40:20 PM) Manning: ive been so isolated so long... i just wanted to be nice, and live a normal life... but events kept forcing me to figure out ways to survive ... smart enough to know whats going on, but helpless to do anything... no-one took any notice of me

(1:40:43 PM) Manning: :(

(1:43:51 PM) Lamo: back

(1:43:59 PM) Manning: im self medicating like crazy when im not toiling in the supply office (my new location, since im being discharged, im not offically intel anymore)

Manning also professes to be an atheist. He [told](#) Lamo that he was raised a Catholic, but:

(10:13:34 AM) Manning: raised catholic... never believed a word of it

(10:13:59 AM) Manning: im godless... i guess i follow humanist values though

(10:14:15 AM) Manning: have custom dogtags that say "Humanist"

But the chats also reveal that Manning's Catholic upbringing was not entirely without fruit. He still believed in absolute right and wrong, and corruption in the U.S. military during the war [seared](#) his soul:

(02:28:00 PM) Manning: its better than disappearing in the middle of the night

(02:28:19 PM) Manning: but just because something is more subtle, doesn't make it right

(02:29:04 PM) Manning: i guess im too idealistic

(02:31:02 PM) Manning: i think the thing that got me the most... that made me rethink the world more than anything

(02:35:46 PM) Manning: was watching 15 detainees taken by the Iraqi Federal Police... for printing "anti-Iraqi literature"... the iraqi federal police wouldn't cooperate with US forces, so i was instructed to investigate the matter, find out who the "bad guys" were, and how significant this was for the FPs... it turned out, they had printed a scholarly critique against PM Maliki... i had an interpreter read it for me... and when i found out that it was a benign political critique titled "Where did the money go?" and following the corruption trail within the PM's cabinet... i immediately took that information and *ran* to the officer to explain what was going on... he didn't want to hear any of it... he told me to shut up and explain how we could assist the FPs in finding *MORE* detainees....

Moreover, Manning allegedly [released](#) the documents for altruistic reasons, rather than to enrich himself.

(02:23:25 PM) Manning: i could've sold to russia or china, and made bank?

(02:23:36 PM) Lamo: why didn't you?

(02:23:58 PM) Manning: because it's public data

(02:24:15 PM) Lamo: i mean, the cables

(02:24:46 PM) Manning: it belongs in the public domain

(02:25:15 PM) Manning: information should be free

(02:25:39 PM) Manning: it belongs in the public domain

(02:26:18 PM) Manning: because another state would just take advantage of the information... try and get some edge

(02:26:55 PM) Manning: if its out in the open... it should be a public good

The complex profile of Manning is that he hoped to have a positive impact, noting that the release of the secret documents would embarrass most of the governments in the world. Indeed, the WikiLeaks



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documents have made corruption controversial worldwide, and have already been the catalyst for [bringing down the corrupt Tunisian government](#). In the chat, Manning claims to have obtained the text of the entire Joint Task Force/Guantanamo memos, which may be forthcoming from WikiLeaks.

WikiLeaks has refused to affirm that Manning was their source for the leaked U.S. government documents, but it has [contributed](#) \$15,100 to Manning's legal defense fund.

Photo: Bradley Manning



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