Chelsea Manning again thrown in solitary

By the Chelsea Manning Support Network and Fight for the Future.
September 23, 2016

After years of inhumane treatment, and having been held in conditions that the UN considers to be torture, Chelsea Manning, the Guardian columnist and whistleblower who has been in prison for years serving a 35-year sentence for exposing some of the US government’s worst abuses, attempted to take her own life July 5, 2016.

After a 5-day hunger strike this month, the US Army finally agreed to provide her with gender reassignment surgery and the health care that she needs.

Chelsea's hunger strike is a historic victory for human rights. However, today, a prison disciplinary board decided to punish Chelsea with 14 days of solitary confinement (with 7 days suspended) for charges related to her suicide attempt, and possession of an unmarked book in her cell.

“If I get in trouble in the next six months, those seven days will come back,” Chelsea noted.

It was the government’s refusal to grant Chelsea access to needed health care that led to her suicide attempt in the first place. And she forgot to write her name and inmate number in a copy of Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy, by Gabriella Coleman.

These bizarre administrative offenses will also be used against her as she attempts to be reclassified as a “minimum security” prisoner, or qualify for parole, in the years to come.

Reacting to today’s decision, Chelsea shared, “I am feeling hurt. I am feeling lonely. I am embarrassed by the decision. I don’t know how to explain it. I am touched by your warm messages of love and support. This comforts me in my time of need.”

Chelsea has been systematically mistreated by the US government since she was first taken into custody in 2010, including long stretches of extreme solitary confinement even before she had ever been convicted.

This is not the first time the government has harassed Chelsea with outrageous charges while in prison. Last year, they threatened her with solitary confinement for minor “infractions” including possession of LGBTQ reading materials and an expired tube of toothpaste. Only after we delivered 100,000 petitions did they back off.

For the most current news, please visit chelseamanning.org

Drone technician Cian Westmoreland

If it failed, we were told that people on our side would potentially die. But I knew that if it stayed up, people on the Afghan side would die.

By Bob Meola, Courage to Resist.
September 21, 2016

Cian Westmoreland is a former drone program technician who has spoken out against the US drone wars. He was one of a group of four drone whistleblowers who spoke out in 2015. Cian joined the Air Force in April 2006. His reasons for joining were multidimensional. But a reason he joined was that his father was in the Air Force.

The following is some of what Cian told me.

“I felt stuck and wanted to get out of town. 40% of the houses in town were condemned.

“I looked at military options and talked to the recruiter to see what they had to offer—Army, Navy, Marines. I chose the Air Force.

“Basic training was in San Antonio. My technical school was at Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Mississippi. My First duty station was Osan Air Base in South Korea, then Spangdahlem Air Base in continued on inside
Germany, and then Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan in 2009.

“I deployed with my unit. We established the site for the 73rd expeditionary Air Control Squadron. My job shifted to RF Transmission Systems. Then Satcom Satellite Communications and Wide Band.

“Our job was to build the site that would basically relay all the communications over the 240,000 square miles in Afghanistan to the CAOC—Combined Air operation Center—at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, and Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

“It was a point, a single point of failure, at that time. If it failed, we were told that people on our side would potentially die. But I knew that if it stayed up, people on the Afghan side would die.

“I had plans to stay in and become a Staff Sgt., until I went to Afghanistan. I even received an early promotion.

“When this mortar exploded about 100 feet away from me, I started to think about my own life and what I was doing there and what I felt in that moment. I tried to imagine what the children were going through who stood at the fence and begged for water every day, while I stood there unable to do anything for them, despite the fact that just behind me we had a Taco Bell, McDonalds, and a Tim Hortons.

“The day the boss gathered us around the equipment and said, ‘We’re killing bad guys here, boys,’ it felt like I had something around my throat. I felt a lump in my throat like I couldn’t breathe.

“One of the reasons I joined the Air Force was to develop a relationship with my dad. I didn’t know how to. On 9/11, he was in Kuwait, working at a headquarters there, when it happened. He had to order all of the initial missile parts to be deployed in Afghanistan. He told me that the leadership there wanted to put cameras on the heads of the missiles so they could watch the impact.

“He said every time a missile impacted it would show on a screen and everybody would cheer. He said, ‘After they hit their targets, they would still have missiles left over, so they would go looking for targets and at the time of the bombings, the targets were considered anybody who was wearing white.

“I knew the culture of the people directing the strikes was not very discriminatory about who they bombed. They were not really concerned with international law and the killing of civilians.

“After my father told me those things and when he came back from Kuwait, he became more quiet and distant. I wanted to understand things that he went through for the military. His story was one I thought a lot about while in Afghanistan, and I understood the heaviness he must have felt.

“Everyone knew there was collateral damage. Most of the data from aircraft was coming through our unit.

“I only had about seven months left. Rather than trying to be a CO [conscientious objector], I just stayed until it was over and then hitchhiked from my base in Germany to Beijing on a journey of self-discovery.

“Then a friend was followed around and harassed and his computer was hacked...I felt like it might have been related to me sharing information with the journalist Chris Woods and I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to come back into the US. Woods wrote the book, Sudden Justice. I had just pointed him to resources to do his own investigative work, but this was in a similar timeframe of Edward Snowden’s leaks, and I was unclear if what I had provided would constitute government actions against me.

“I was depressed and I was going to disappear and not come back. I decided to come back for my sister’s wedding in summer, 2014. Now I’m here [in the US].

“All my [credit and debit] cards were blocked for a few days. I couldn’t get cash or make purchases right after talking to The Intercept this past fall [2015] in NYC. It was fixed soon, but [Attorney] Jesselynn Radack said other clients of hers have had problems as well.

“We didn’t do what Snowden or Manning did. We didn’t leak anything. We didn’t give information. But we are speaking out. They could try to construe that we are aiding the enemy by giving info about certain events and what might have happened.

“Brandon [former AF drone pilot Brandon Bryant] and I both agreed that we would be willing to stand trial at the International Criminal Court for what we participated in, because we believe it was an illegal war. I know myself to be a war criminal by international standards. We participated in what would constitute war crimes if any other soldier from any other nation perpetrated it. The US signing of the Nuremberg Principles after WWII set the norm that ‘just following orders’ is not a valid excuse for human rights violations. Our work, in the Global War on Terror, killed civilians in ways that were massively disproportionate to the threat most targets on the ground actually posed. We excessively used airpower when it wasn’t needed. We had no formal declaration of war or any business being in this region militarily. But despite knowing that my equipment

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would most likely be used in war crimes, I still just followed orders.

“I hold myself personally guilty as an accessory to murder in Afghanistan and Pakistan. With air strikes, it’s not just the pilot who is pulling the trigger. Everybody has a part in making it happen. It is volunteering your energy for excessive force and unlawful killing of civilians. I’m living, so my mission now is to be sustainable and help promote transparency, accountability, and sustainability. We’ve created a meat industry out of war. We’ve hidden the effects of everything that goes into our way of life. Everything in our society runs on oil and precious metals. People need to know that the way they live has a much longer and deeper impact than what they see. With drones, our citizens don’t have to physically come into contact with the people we are killing anymore, just like we don’t come in contact with the animals we eat in our food. It allows us to live in illusionary worlds where we are deprived of the exposure to our own personal violent consequences and have very little incentive to improve how we interact with the world.

“I want to create a more comprehensive sense of responsibility linking drones and sustainability in the public psyche—the furthest extent of our commitment to killing people who oppose us vs. creating a world where violence makes little sense. We need to create micro-grids and empower local levels of governance, then focus on bringing people out of their survivalistic patterns of behavior into community.

“Hard power or soft power? More security or culture and diplomacy? The US could try to make itself a more inclusive democracy and export sustainability as our foreign policy... We need to see how our everyday actions promote peace or promote war.”

Complete article online

Drone tech Cian Westmoreland continued

On June 27, 2016, about 150 supporters of Chelsea Manning marched in the SF Pride Parade. Organized by Courage to Resist and the Chelsea Manning Support Network, this was one of a half dozen contingents in Pride events worldwide this year in support of Chelsea Manning. Above, Pentagon Papers whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg helps led the contingent down Market Street. While you can’t see them from this photo, we were again joined by the Chelsea Manning Flash Mob Dancers.

War resisters in Canada continued

came to power in Canada, intent on cracking down on the hundreds of Iraq war resisters in Canada. A government order branded them as criminals, leaving some to be deported to face up to 24 months in jail while those who stayed in Canada were denied permanent residency. Others voluntarily returned to the United States.

As he campaigned to be prime minister, Trudeau hinted he would do things differently. Speaking last year in Winnipeg, he criticised the Conservative government for its lack of compassion and understanding toward the war resisters. “I am supportive of the principle of allowing conscientious objectors to stay,” Trudeau told the crowd. His words echoed those of his father, Pierre Trudeau, who declared Canada to be “a refuge from militarism” during the Vietnam war.

Some nine months after Trudeau was elected, Iraq war resisters in Canada continue to live in legal limbo. “I’m shocked and dismayed that it is still going on,” said Dean Walcott, a former US Marine corporal who served four tours in Iraq before escaping to Canada in 2006.

He is one of four war resisters whose immigration status is slated to be reviewed by a federal court in November. The court has given the Trudeau government until mid-September to decide whether it wants to continue with the Conservative policy of opposing the resisters’ bid to remain in Canada.

Polls suggest most Canadians support the idea of allowing war resisters to stay in the country, with 63% saying in June that they should be allowed to become permanent residents. “I don’t think this is surprising,” said Michelle Robidoux of the War Resisters Support Campaign, which assists Iraq war resisters as they forge new lives in Canada, pointing to Canadians’ widespread opposition to the Iraq war and the welcome extended to resisters during the Vietnam war.

Complete article online
War resisters in Canada hope new gov’t will allow them to stay

Years after crossing the border to avoid heading back to war, former US soldiers still live in fear of being deported home to face potential jail time for desertion.

Excerpts from Ashifa Kassam, the Guardian, August 2, 2016

It’s been more than a decade since Joshua Key chose to cross into Canada rather than continue as a US soldier in the Iraq war. But, at times, he still feels as though he’s fighting a war—one he describes as “a war against my post-traumatic stress disorder, a conflict against my contract with the military and a battle with the Canadian government”.

He arrived in Canada in 2005—soon after Canada’s then government declared it would not actively participate in the US-led war in Iraq—following in the footsteps of the up to 90,000 Americans who sought refuge in Canada during the Vietnam war era. But unlike those who poured into Canada in the 1960s and 70s, the estimated 200 Iraq war resisters who arrived decades later found little government support in their bid to stay in Canada. Years after crossing the border, the 15 or so known resisters who remain in Canada live lives coloured with uncertainty, the threat of being deported home to face potential jail time for desertion looming constantly over their new lives.

Vigil at the Canadian consulate in NYC, July 2008—one of many organized by Courage to Resist.

Now they’re calling on Justin Trudeau, Canada’s prime minister, and his Liberal government to reverse years of government antagonism and allow them to stay in Canada permanently.

Shortly after, the Conservatives

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US Army Chaplain: “I refuse to support US armed drone policy”

On June 6, 2016, Reverend Chris Antal, minister for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Rock Tavern, New York, read the following resignation letter on Democracy Now! He was an Army Reserve Chaplain Captain in Afghanistan.

Dear Mr. President:

I hereby resign my commission as an Officer in the United States Army.

I resign because I refuse to support US armed drone policy. The Executive Branch continues to claim the right to kill anyone, anywhere on earth, at any time, for secret reasons, based on secret evidence, in a secret process, undertaken by unidentified officials. I refuse to support this policy of unaccountable killing.

I resign because I refuse to support US nuclear weapons policy. The Executive Branch continues to invest billions of dollars into nuclear weapons, which threaten the existence of humankind and the earth. I refuse to support this policy of terror and mutually assured destruction.

I resign because I refuse to support US policy of preventive war, permanent military supremacy and global power projection.

The Executive Branch continues to claim extra-constitutional authority and impunity from international law. I refuse to support this policy of imperial overstretch.

I resign because I refuse to serve as an empire chaplain. I cannot reconcile these policies with either my sworn duty to protect and defend America and our constitutional democracy or my covenantal commitment to the core principles of my religion faith. These principles include: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations, a free and responsible search for truth, a commitment to the democratic process, and the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: PARDON EDWARD SNOWDEN & CHELSEA MANNING!