

PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Open Letter on the Solitary Confinement of PFC Bradley Manning

January 3, 2011

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary
100 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) is deeply concerned about the conditions under which PFC Bradley Manning is being held at the Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia. It has been [reported](#) and verified by his [attorney](#) that PFC Manning has been held in solitary confinement since July of 2010. He reportedly is held in his cell for approximately 23 hours a day, a cell approximately six feet wide and twelve feet in length, with a bed, a drinking fountain, and a toilet. For no discernable reason other than punishment, he is forbidden from exercising in his cell and is provided minimal access to exercise outside his cell. Further, despite having virtually nothing to do, he is forbidden to sleep during the day and often has his sleep at night disrupted.

As an organization of psychologists and other mental health professionals, PsySR is aware that solitary confinement can have severely deleterious effects on the psychological well-being of those subjected to it. We therefore call for a revision in the conditions of PFC Manning's incarceration while he awaits trial, based on the exhaustive documentation and research that have determined that solitary confinement is, at the very least, a form of cruel, unusual and inhumane treatment in violation of U.S. law.

In the majority opinion of the U.S. Supreme Court case *Medley, Petitioner*, 134 U.S. 1690 (1890), U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Freeman Miller wrote, "A considerable number of the prisoners fell, after even a short confinement, into a semi-fatuous condition, from which it was next to impossible to arouse them, and others became violently insane; others still, committed suicide; while those who stood the ordeal better were not generally reformed, and in most cases did not recover sufficient mental activity to be of any subsequent service to the community." Scientific investigations since 1890 have confirmed in troubling detail the irreversible physiological changes in brain functioning from the trauma of solitary confinement.

As expressed by [Dr. Craig Haney](#), a psychologist and expert in the assessment of institutional environments, "Empirical research on solitary and supermax-like confinement has consistently and unequivocally documented the harmful consequences of living in these kinds of environments . . . Evidence of these negative psychological effects comes from personal accounts, descriptive studies, and systematic research on solitary and supermax-type confinement, conducted over a period of four decades, by researchers from several different continents who had diverse backgrounds and a wide range of professional expertise. . . [D]irect studies of prison isolation have documented an extremely broad range of harmful psychological reactions. These effects include increases in the following potentially damaging symptoms and problematic behaviors: negative attitudes and affect, insomnia, anxiety, panic, withdrawal, hypersensitivity, ruminations, cognitive dysfunction, hallucinations, loss of control, irritability, aggression, and rage, paranoia, hopelessness, lethargy, depression, a sense of impending emotional breakdown, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and behavior" (pp. 130-131, references removed).

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Dr. Haney concludes, “To summarize, there is not a single published study of solitary or supermax-like confinement in which non-voluntary confinement lasting for longer than 10 days where participants were unable to terminate their isolation at will that failed to result in negative psychological effects” (p. 132).

We are aware that prison spokesperson [First Lieutenant Brian Villiard](#) has told AFP that Manning is considered a “maximum confinement detainee,” as he is considered a national security risk. But no such putative risk can justify keeping someone not convicted of a crime in conditions likely to cause serious harm to his mental health. Further, history suggests that solitary confinement, rather than being a rational response to a risk, is more often used as a punishment for someone who is considered to be a member of a despised or “dangerous” group. In any case, PFC Manning has not been convicted of a crime and, under our system of justice, is at this point presumed to be innocent.

The conditions of isolation to which PFC Manning, as well as many other U.S. prisoners are subjected, are sufficiently harsh as to have aroused international concern. The most recent [report](#) of the UN Committee against Torture included in its Conclusions and Recommendations for the United States the following article 36:

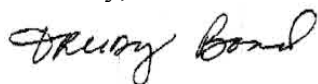
The Committee remains concerned about the extremely harsh regime imposed on detainees in “supermaximum prisons”. The Committee is concerned about the prolonged isolation periods detainees are subjected to, the effect such treatment has on their mental health, and that its purpose may be retribution, in which case it would constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 16).

The State party should review the regime imposed on detainees in “supermaximum prisons”, in particular the practice of prolonged isolation. (Emphasis in original.)

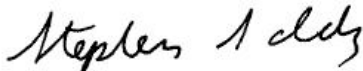
In addition to the needless brutality of the conditions to which PFC Manning is being subjected, PsySR is concerned that the coercive nature of these conditions -- along with their serious psychological effects such as depression, paranoia, or hopelessness -- may undermine his ability to meaningfully cooperate with his defense, undermining his right to a fair trial. Coercive conditions of detention also increase the likelihood of the prisoner “cooperating” in order to improve those circumstances, even to the extent of giving false testimony. Thus, such harsh conditions are counter to the interests of justice.

Given the nature and effects of the solitary confinement to which PFC Manning is being subjected, Mr. Secretary, Psychologists for Social Responsibility calls upon you to rectify the inhumane, harmful, and counterproductive treatment of PFC Bradley Manning immediately.

Sincerely,



Trudy Bond, Ph.D.
Psychologists for Social Responsibility Steering Committee



Stephen Soldz, Ph.D.
President, Psychologists for Social Responsibility

For the Psychologists for Social Responsibility Steering Committee