

THE POLITICS OF EMBARRASSMENT

Tonya Morton

I was disappointed, if not surprised, by the recent resignation of US State Department official P. J. Crowley, who grabbed headlines with his statements that Bradley Manning's treatment at the hands of the Quantico Detention Center has been both "ridiculous" and "stupid—light words, really, compared to "torture," the word chosen by Manning's lawyer and Amnesty International. But what disappoints me most isn't that Crowley was fired for expressing a reasonable opinion. What disappoints me is that he was forced to resign because, by expressing his opinion, he unwittingly exposed his boss—the president—supporting policies that any layperson could see are patently "ridiculous" and "stupid". He was fired for making clear to the world that the Obama administration supports certain policies in private that it doesn't want to have to admit to supporting in public.

The only thing that seems to register with this administration lately is embarrassment—not to be confused with shame, which would be the logical response to admitting they had acted inappropriately or supported morally unsound policies. The administration has shown no signs of being ashamed, for instance, about selling British nuclear secrets to Russia in order to speed through negotiations of the recent arms treaty. And they weren't ashamed about the secret war they've been conducting in Pakistan, about sending CIA operatives and mercenaries into a country with which we're supposedly allied. They weren't ashamed at all. They were just angry and embarrassed at being caught.



It should be of grave concern to anyone fond of his own freedom that the Obama administration is more upset about looking bad in front of America than it is concerned with the fact that its government is supporting corrupt and criminal behavior.

Crowley is lucky to have gotten off with just a forced resignation. The Obama administration has taken such a harsh line on whistleblowers and muckrakers lately, he shouldn't have been surprised to find himself in jail. Right now, Stephen Kim, a Korean-born analyst and one of Crowley's colleagues in the State Department, is currently under indictment for "compromising national security." And to which terrorist organization did he pass his top-secret information? Fox News. Kim gave a wholly unremarkable interview with the cable news network in which he expressed his opinions on how North Korea would react to economic sanctions. Apparently that's now grounds for serving 10 years.

But that isn't nearly as terrible as what's happened to Thomas Drake, a former senior executive at the National Security Agency. When Drake felt that his employer, the NSA, had passed up numerous opportunities to instate an accountable, and legal, means of routing out terrorism in favor of an illegal, inefficient and dangerous program of warrantless wiretapping and surveillance, he turned to a reporter at the Baltimore Sun. Using Drake's information, the reporter publicly exposed the mismanagement and the illegality of the NSA's actions. Drake has now been indicted, like Daniel Ellsberg before him, under the Espionage Act of 1917. He faces up to 35 years in jail.

It seems to be a theme of this administration: when the government lies and commits crimes against its own citizens, the blame doesn't fall on the lawbreakers; the blame falls on the guy who told. Take, for instance, the case of the U.S. covert spy war in Iran. It turns out that U.S. officials, in an idiotic attempt to foil Iran's nuclear ambitions, actually provided nuclear design plans to the Iranians. While the plans supposedly contained one flaw which would keep the nuclear bombs from working, officials later admitted that the flaw was a rather obvious one and that the rest of the design was entirely correct. In fact, they admitted, they had provided the Iranians with a precise roadmap for nuclear development. And which government official will be going to jail as a result of this complete bungling of national security?

The answer: Jeffrey Sterling, a former CIA officer, who was uninvolved in the plan. Sterling has not been arraigned for selling nuclear secrets to Iran; but rather for tipping off a reporter to the details of the fiasco. Further, Sterling ap-

parently had the gumption to describe details to the same reporter of the USA's practice of using extraordinary rendition to cover up illegal detentions of prisoners of war. What will be Sterling's prize for all that honesty? Sterling faces up to 120 years in prison and \$2.5 million in fines. The punishment for the men who sold nuclear secrets to Iran and broke international law with regard to prisoners of war? Nada.

The Obama administration doesn't seem particularly interested in war crimes. They seem to stifle a big yawn at corruption and government malfeasance. What really ticks them off, the real crime, is bringing illegal activities to light and em-



barrassing the administration. Who could be more deserving of incarceration, for instance, than the Apache helicopter pilots who mowed down two Reuters journalists and numerous civilians without a hint of remorse? And who deserves to sit naked and blind, stripped of both clothes and glasses, in a solitary cell at Quantico more than the men who gave the orders to cover up civilian deaths and the torture of detainees? The answer, according to the Obama administration, is that Bradley Manning, who exposed the actions of the Apache pilots and the corrupt officials, is more deserving. Yes, clearly Manning and his ilk—not forgetting P.J. Crowley, who had the nerve to call Manning's detention "stupid"—are what's wrong with America.

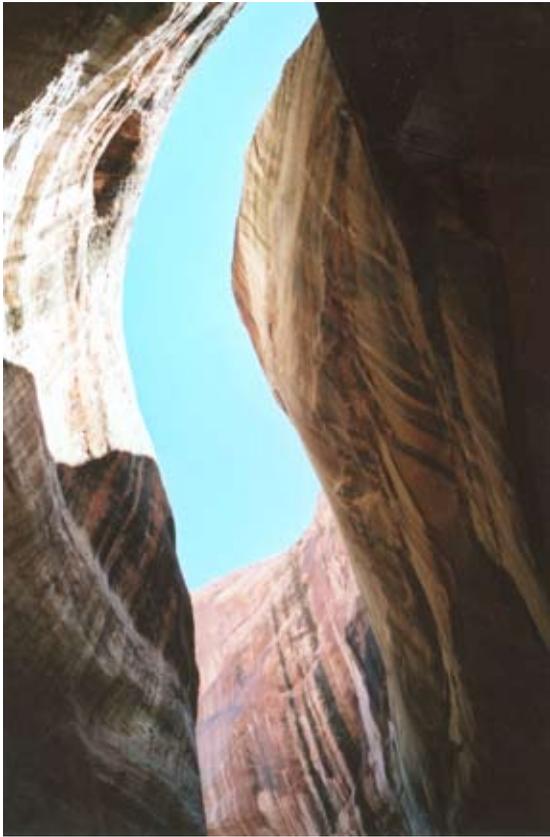
The most striking element of all these charges, as far as I can see, is the criminalization of an informed citizenry. Who was the target, really, of Bradley Manning's leaked information? No one has been able to point out a single case in which Manning's information helped Al Qaeda or the Taliban. No one is claiming that the information is bolstering the spirits of the Iranians. The target of Manning's leak was the American news media, and by extension, the American people. In each case listed above, the intended recipient of the leaked information wasn't a foreign government or a terrorist organization. It was the press. The target was Americans. And so when Manning is charged with "aiding the enemy" and Thomas Drake is charged with "espionage," one has to wonder who that "enemy" really is? If these cases are any clue, the enemy is us.

Daniel Ellsberg, who released the Pentagon Papers in 1971, detailing US malfeasance in Vietnam, and who was charged and later released on charges under the Espionage Act of 1917, is a man uniquely qualified to speak on matters of government transparency. In a recent interview with a Politico reporter, Ellsberg said Obama's "campaign against whistleblowers" is "unprecedented." In a separate interview with Spiegel, he called Obama, with regard to whistleblowers, "worse than Bush." That isn't high praise from a man who once claimed George W. Bush had aspirations to dictatorship. As Ellsberg's own history shows, an attack on government whistleblowers is an attack on the American public's right to know. It should be of grave concern to anyone fond of his own freedom that the Obama administration is more upset about looking bad in front of America than it is concerned with the fact that its government is supporting corrupt and criminal behavior.

And who can provide the best indictment of Obama the President of 2011? Why, that would be Obama the candidate of 2008, who said, "Government whistleblowers are part of a healthy democracy and must be protected from reprisal." In the same campaign, Obama described instances of whistleblowing as "acts of courage and patriotism, which can sometimes save lives and often save taxpayer dollars." I wonder if Obama remembered those words from his younger, more idealistic self as he signed off on P.J. Crowley's resignation. Or whether he felt the lingering stabs of conscience as he defended the detention procedures used on Bradley Manning as "appropriate." How would Obama respond to that younger version of himself, who supported the courageous over the cowardly? It's just too bad that "courage" and "patriotism" aren't as much fun when you're the one with egg on your face.

TONYA MORTON is a regular contributor to The Zephyr.





Help us restore a masterpiece.
**THE GLEN CANYON
 INSTITUTE**
 www.glencanyon.org

TSAKURSHOVI



The home
 of the
**“DON'T
 WORRY,
 BE HOPI”**
 T-shirt

A unique selection of traditional Hopi arts, crafts, and cultural items including over 150 Katsina dolls done in the traditional style, as well as baskets, ceremonial textiles, jewelry, pottery and more.

We also have complete visitor information (including connections for knowledgeable & articulate guides) to make your visit to Hopi a memorable & enjoyable one. We are located 1 1/2 miles east of the Hopi Cultural Center at MP 381 on HWY 264, in the heart of the HOPI REZ

928.734.2478 POB 234 SECOND MESA, AZ 86043



“NATALIE” friend of MARCIA MARSHALL
 Minneapolis, MN



HOPE BENEDICT
 Salmon, ID



TED HELM
 Brentwood, TN



RACHEL WHITE
 SLC, UT



STEVE SMITH
 Louisville, KY



GARY MEEKS
 Price, Utah

JIM CASE
 Flagstaff, AZ



PAUL EBBERT
 Lander, WY



SAM CAMP
 Big Bar, CA



RICHARD INGEBRETSEN
 Salt Lake City,



JANIE TUFT
 Moab, Utah



BRENT SWANSON
 Idaho falls, ID



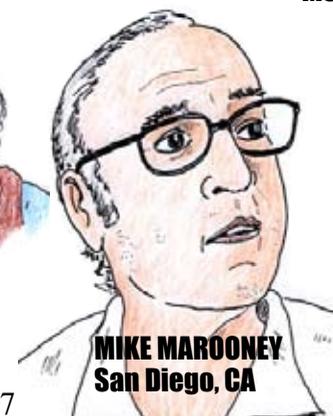
DAVE YARBROUGH
 Waddy, KY



TONI McCONNEL
 Flagstaff, AZ



BERNARD COLE
 Flagstaff, AZ



MIKE MAROONEY
 San Diego, CA



DON BAUMGARDT
 El Paso, TX

MO' BONE!