

CONSCIENTIOUS RESISTANCE VS. WAR CRIMES GOVERNMENT

What does “real” resistance look like? Chelsea Manning just showed us.

On Thursday, May 16, the famous whistleblower was put in federal prison. Her offense? Refusing to testify before a federal grand jury. She declared to the judge who inflicted the punishment on her, **“The government cannot build a prison bad enough, cannot create a system worse than the idea that I would ever change my principles. I’d rather starve to death than to change my opinions in this regard. I mean that quite literally.”**

When the judge countered with, “There’s nothing dishonorable in discharging your responsibility as a US citizen,” Manning retorted, **“I believe this grand jury seeks to undermine the integrity of public discourse with the aim of punishing those who expose any serious, ongoing and systemic abuses of power by this government.”**

That’s called “Speaking Truth to Power,” and in this instance it was not merely symbolic. The consequences of this choice could keep Chelsea behind bars for 18 months. What’s more, the judge upped the ante monetarily. After 30 days, Chelsea will be fined \$500 per day while imprisoned, and after 60, \$1000 per day. If she is held for the maximum period, the total would be around half a million dollars. Her lawyers assert that such fines are common against corporations but that it’s “less usual” against a human witness. Chelsea had previously been jailed for two months for refusing to testify to another federal grand jury, and had been free for just one week on May 16. She had been released only because the previous grand jury’s term had ended. They are currently limited to a maximum length of 18 months - but this new grand jury is virtually identical and essentially a continuation of the first.

On May 6, while still imprisoned during the first grand jury, Chelsea released a statement about her insistence on non-cooperation that read in part:

“After two months of confinement and using every legal mechanism available so far, I can - without any hesitation - state that nothing will convince me to testify before this or any other grand jury for that matter. This experience so far only proves my long-held belief that grand juries are simply outdated tools used by the federal government to harass and disrupt political opponents and activists in fishing expeditions....The way I am being treated proves what a corrupt and abusive tool this truly is. With each passing day my disappointment and frustration grow, but so too do my commitments to doing the right thing and continuing to refuse to submit. I can either go to jail or betray my principles.



The latter exists as a much worse prison than the government can construct.”

On May 16, before going before the judge, Chelsea told reporters, **“In solidarity with many activists facing the odds, I will stand by my principles. I will exhaust every legal remedy available. My legal team continues to challenge the secrecy of these proceedings, and I am prepared to face the consequences of my refusal.”**

Chelsea also said: **“Jails and prisons exist as a dark institution. And despite that, it doesn’t frighten me or disturb me. I’ve already been to jail, I’ve already been to prison, so attempting to coerce me with a grand jury subpoena is just not going to work....Ultimately, this is an attempt to place me back in confinement. I think that the questions are the same questions I was asked at the court-martial seven or eight years ago. They’re not asking anything new.”**

I suspect that Obama’s commuting of Chelsea’s sentence was considered inappropriate by many in the corporate-military oligarchy. Honestly, I was shocked by Obama’s choice at the time, and felt like it was arguably the best thing he did while in office (though the list of his positive accomplishments to choose from was certainly short). These grand jury summons provide an opportunity for the oligarchs to renew punitive measures against Chelsea, and that sucks.

Trump aside, the ruling class resents Chelsea’s exposures of the workings of the US military and the government. Historian Vijay Prashad explains that:

“What they are really going after Julian Assange for is the leaks that came through Chelsea Manning, who is in fact an international hero and should not right now be in prison. What Chelsea Manning showed us was the ‘Collateral Murder’ video - but much more than that, she deeply embarrassed the United States government for the way its diplomatic corps was operating, for instance, during the Arab Spring - our diplomacy no longer being run in a political way by the State Department, but by the Defense Department. And, even more dangerously, by the anonymous National Security State. That’s something that the US government doesn’t want out there in the public.”

Strict control of the press is a hallmark of authoritarian regimes. However one feels personally about Assange, it cannot be denied that WikiLeaks has done no more than play the traditional role of publisher. No less a figure than Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz (hardly a radical) has stated that he believes, **“There is no constitutional difference between WikiLeaks and the New York Times.”** Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers to that newspaper of record in 1971, unequivocally stated that, **“The truth is that every attack now made on WikiLeaks and Julian Assange was made against me and the release of the Pentagon Papers at the time.”** Ellsberg also warned:

“This is the first indictment of a journalist and editor or publisher, Julian Assange. And if it’s successful, it will not be the last....None of them have been put on trial up till now. But in this case, if that’s all it takes, then no journalist is safe. The freedom of the press is not safe. It’s over. And I think our republic is in its last days, because unauthorized disclosures of this kind are the lifeblood of the republic.”

So with this grand jury the stakes are high, not just for Chelsea personally, but for press freedom and an open society generally. We should all be grateful that she is not cooperating. It is in the interest of the public at large that this grand jury fails in its goals.

Chelsea’s act of resistance is public and her motivations are clear. She is providing an example of a tactic - **dedicated non-cooperation** - that if followed by enough people in enough ways, would lead to dramatic, widespread systemic change. Put in her position, I have no idea if I would be so principled. But if I ever do find myself there, and I am able to stand strong, I will have Chelsea to credit in part for inspiration.

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FOREVER WAR NEVERMORE!

Both Israel and the U.S. need Iran. They need to be able to point to Iran as a threat, as a menace - as the source of terrorism and evil in the world. That threat, though fabricated, is also an important part of any election campaign for politicians in both countries.

Notwithstanding the rhetoric coming from Washington, where the national security advisor and secretary of state have been busy pushing for war, the U.S. is not prepared to pay the consequences for attacking Iran. While it is hard to dispute that the U.S. has superior military strength and, should it decide to do so, can destroy Tehran, there is more to war than just sheer military power.

The same can be said for Israel. While politicians and commanders in Tel-Aviv tend to flex their muscles in public, it is unlikely they could stomach an all-out war with a well-trained and motivated army. According to a piece in *The New York Times*, acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan presented an updated military plan that envisions sending as many as 120,000 troops to the Middle East should a war with Iran take place. There is most likely another report somewhere that says how many of them will return in body bags, and that is the report they are not as likely to make public.

Neither Israel nor the U.S. could possibly be prepared for the cost of such a war. The cost in dollars is one thing. But then there’s the cost in human life, which includes the heavy toll that will be paid for the day and days after an initial attack takes place. Maintaining an ongoing war against what will surely be a dedicated and relentless ground resistance to any foreign presence on Iranian soil is something Israel and the U.S. are likely to avoid at all costs. Israel faced a dedicated resistance during its occupation of South Lebanon and eventually left, licking its wounds, in 2000. When in 2006 it attempted to invade with ground forces, the Lebanese fighters proved too much for Israel’s elite forces and they once again escaped in humiliation.

The U.S. does not have the stomach to face a motivated, patriotic resistance the likes of which it saw in Vietnam and to a large degree still faces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Or would face in Venezuela. While some voters in Israel and the U.S. may see attacking Iran favorably today, once the cost becomes clear and once the bodies start coming back, it would be a completely different story.

While attacking Iran would prove to be fruitless, threatening an attack on Iran and not attacking is far more useful. Iran supports forces of resistance like Hamas and Hezbollah that would never have existed had it not been for Israeli violence and occupation of Palestine and southern Lebanon. Israel needs an enemy it can point to as a threat to its existence. While Israel still claims that the Palestinians are an existential threat, at least militarily that has never been true, and fewer people are buying it. Iran, on the other hand, is persuasively painted as evil and menacing thanks to a dedicated and vociferous campaign in Israel and the U.S. that has worked

to demonize it for many years. **Never-mind the fact that Iran’s resistance to Israel and its support of the Palestinian struggle is politically and morally right.**

Israel has not fought a war against an organized army since 1973. The Israeli air force pilots, who operate state-of-the-art warplanes, have not faced any serious force that possesses effective anti-aircraft capabilities in decades. Judging by Israel’s confrontations with Hamas and Hezbollah fighters, it is quite clear that Israeli ground forces are not capable of standing up to, never-mind defeating, a well-trained, motivated fighting force, even if it possesses inferior weapons.

U.S. forces have not successfully fought an actual regular army since World War II. The wars in which it has been engaged since then, with the exception perhaps of the Korean War, were largely against guerrilla forces, and the U.S. paid a heavy toll in its attempts to fight them. So it is not at all clear whether it can succeed in defeating the Iranian army.

Both Israeli and U.S. leaders are given reports that estimate the body count in case of a war. It is not unlikely that the leaders of both countries have seen these reports and fear the consequences of an all-out war with Iran.

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US BASES SURROUNDING IRAN

