

PJ CROWLEY EXPLAINS WHY MANNING'S TREATMENT IS RIDICULOUS, COUNTERPRODUCTIVE, AND STUPID

PJ Crowley has a very important Guardian piece on why he said the treatment of Bradley Manning was ridiculous, counterproductive, and stupid. After explaining that Manning, if convicted, "should spend a long, long time in prison," and then claiming that the overall narrative of the State Department cables shows a story of "rightdoing," he describes how Manning's treatment undermines our own strategic narrative.

But I understood why the question was asked. Private Manning's family, joined by a number of human rights organisations, has questioned the extremely restrictive conditions he has experienced at the brig at Marine Corps base Quantico, Virginia. I focused on the fact that he was forced to sleep naked, which led to a circumstance where he stood naked for morning call.

Based on 30 years of government experience, if you have to explain why a guy is standing naked in the middle of a jail cell, you have a policy in need of urgent review. The Pentagon was quick to point out that no women were present when he did so, which is completely beside the point.

Our strategic narrative connects our policies to our interests, values and aspirations. While what we do, day in and day out, is broadly consistent with the universal principles we espouse,

individual actions can become disconnected. Every once in a while, even a top-notch symphony strikes a discordant note. So it is in this instance.

The Pentagon has said that it is playing the Manning case by the book. The book tells us what actions we can take, but not always what we *should* do. Actions can be legal and still not smart. With the Manning case unfolding in a fishbowl-like environment, going strictly by the book is not good enough. Private Manning's overly restrictive and even petty treatment undermines what is otherwise a strong legal and ethical position.

When the United States leads by example, we are not trying to win a popularity contest. Rather, we are pursuing our long-term strategic interest. The United States cannot expect others to meet international standards if we are seen as falling short. Differences become strategic when magnified through the lens of today's relentless 24/7 global media environment.

So, when I was asked about the "elephant in the room," I said the treatment of Private Manning, while well-intentioned, was "ridiculous" and "counterproductive" and, yes, "stupid".

I stand by what I said. The United States should set the global standard for treatment of its citizens – and then exceed it. It is what the world expects of us. It is what we should expect of ourselves.

While I suspect DOD is on narrower procedural grounds than Crowley gives them credit for (but by doing so, his own argument is stronger), Crowley is right that the treatment of Manning

believes America's claims to support the rule of law.

That said, I think Crowley is likely still too close to the government bubble to see how much else the entire WikiLeaks episode demonstrates the hollowness of "our interests, values and aspirations." Starting from when the government probably hacked and then shut down a media entity, even while scolding Tunisia for doing the same, down to the many cables where we've placed our interests above any claim to rule of law or human rights.

And those are just the secret cables.

But I think that's true of our policy-makers in general. Our country has totally lost its ability to invoke the myth of the noble America that made our hegemony more palatable globally. Manning's treatment is just one of the most salient examples of that.