



The Passion of Bradley Manning

Guest: Chase Madar

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Chase Madar is the author of The Passion of Bradley Manning: The Story Behind the Wikileaks Whistleblower.

WOODS: There are two topics we've got to hit on here. One of them is the one I think people are more interested in because they know about it, and that's Bradley Manning. You've written a book about that whole issue. I want to cover that second. But first, you've got an article coming out in March/April issue of *The American Conservative*; people will be able read it at TheAmericanConservative.com. I don't want to take away your thunder here by giving away the punchline, but the article is called "The Anti-Warrior." Apparently, you have found an antiwar voice in the unlikeliest of places. Can you elaborate on that?

MADAR: Oh, yeah, I've written a glowing profile—usually I write kind of nasty things, but this is a glowing profile of a foreign policy wonk by the name of Micah Zenko. He is very pro-peace, in fact he's a pacifist. He writes great things about drones, about the perils of a militarized foreign policy, about the need for far-sighted statecraft, and he's a real defender of the diplomatic arts, which everyone on both sides of the aisle in Washington is always dumping on, as if you're not a real manly man if you believe in diplomacy, as if there's something wrong with you if you don't think any act of diplomacy isn't some capitulation like Munich in 1938. But the punchline is that this guy works at the Council on Foreign Relations, which is of course the pinnacle of the foreign policy establishment, with ritzy offices in Manhattan and Washington and an organization with a pretty cruddy reputation, given that its membership has by and large supported most of the worst foreign-policy decisions of the past 50 years. I'm talking about the Vietnam War, that later spun into Cambodia and Laos, I'm talking about the invasion of Iraq and the escalation of the Afghan War—really the last place on earth you'd expect to find a pacifist. Maybe in some kind of witness relocation program, or he's hiding out there.

WOODS: [Laughter] No one would ever think to look for him there, right?

MADAR: Right, no one would ever think to look. But he's a real nice guy. He does great work and he writes a great blog, and his little center within the Council on Foreign Relations is called the center for preventive action, with the idea that far-sighted diplomacy can head off violent struggles and violent conflicts in much of the world. And it's not against American participation in world affairs; it's not isolationist by any stretch—a word that really doesn't have much meaning, I find. It's against a knee-jerk military response to every crisis that arises in the world. This guy, Micah Zenko, he's great on Twitter, and he's worth checking out.

WOODS: He's got an essay, which I haven't read but you refer to it in your article, called "The New Forever War." What was the gist of that?

MADAR: It's a very downbeat piece, but even if the AUMF—the authorization to use military force, that authorized the war against al-Qaeda, a very vague and open-ended authorization—is revoked by Washington, he thinks that things will still kind of carry on the same, that changing a law won't be enough to put the brakes on our open-ended assassination and counter-insurgency campaigns. It won't ground the drones, because our use of those killing machines seems to only be expanding. That these habits have set in and that Washington, just like pretty much any other institution, is more a creature of custom and habit than it is of law.

WOODS: One of the problems, of course, with U.S. foreign policy has been how bipartisan it's been. We hear in Washington that we need more cooperation, we need less political infighting, but I would like to see foreign policy hobbled by more infighting. Sometimes we see domestic policies ground to a halt because there's infighting, but for some reason the wars always go on. We've got to have our priorities here: the milk subsidies can wait; but the wars have to go on. It really has been bipartisan. And I think some of this has to do with the fact that Americans—I suppose it wouldn't have to be just Americans, but whoever happens to be the hegemon—but people identify themselves with the regime, they identify themselves with the foreign policy. And so if you insult the foreign policy, it's like you're insulting them; they've got a nephew who's in the military—

You know, I'm going to be blunt here. I think American nationalism, like many forms of nationalism, is really just a sentiment for losers who have accomplished nothing in their lives to be able to latch onto something, put that American flag on their cars and feel like they belong, feel like they're important. So if you criticize American foreign policy, you're criticizing them, you're a pinko commie, you hate America.

This manifests itself in all kinds of ways. When I'm on a plane, it frustrates me to no end that we're all supposed to applaud because we've got two members of the military on the plane. Now, I know that you can say that it's not their fault, they're just following orders, but for heaven's sake, it's your responsibility before making a decision like entering the military to research, to look up something on what the military is doing, have some knowledge about what's going on. But everybody on that plane—people who are left-liberals, people who are traditional conservatives, people who are neocons, people who are middle of the road, people who have no political opinions, who are just soccer moms, whatever, just the regular guy who's a Red Sox fan and has no skin in the game, whatever, they all clap for those people who are defending our freedom, when we know perfectly well what they're doing has nothing to do with defending our freedom.

So at times it's nice to see that there's an exception to the rule at the CFR, but how do you not give in to total despair? You and I travel in antiwar circles and we feel like we're making a lot of inroads and the polls seem to be going our way, but when you go to that shopping mall or you sit on that airplane, it seems like it's as bad as ever.

MADAR: Well, we certainly have our work cut out for us. That's an understatement, isn't it? It is a bipartisan problem. You know, I would welcome some gridlock when it comes to appropriations for our never-ending war in Afghanistan or for our very ill-judged, anti-strategic and immoral drone campaign in more and more countries. Let's have some gridlock there.

I'm a little bit optimistic. There seems to be some peace room opening up, whether it's in our foreign policy or whether it's in the domestic side of that with growing opposition to NSA surveillance. You've got great bipartisan cooperation going against NSA spying. I look back at the bill co-sponsored by left-wing black social Democrat stalwart John Conyers of Detroit with the rural Michigan's Justin Amash, a Tea Party

favorite, they worked together to craft a great bill that would have cut funding for NSA spying just a few months after the revelations came out and it nearly passed, and I'm pretty optimistic that we're going to see that de-clawed and defanged and we're going to get some freedom back there, thanks to the efforts of good civil libertarians on both the Left and the Right, but, yeah, we do have our work cut out for us when it comes to cutting out this never-ending war.

WOODS: Now one good trend that I see, in addition to what you just mentioned, is that it does seem that the younger people tend to be much more skeptical of the war propaganda. I wonder if that's just a result of the fact that younger people are much more likely to get their information from the Internet, where you don't have information spoon-fed to you, you know, according to what the *Washington Post* thinks you need to know, but you can get news from all over the world, you can get news from all different sources, you can get information from your friend who made a YouTube. And your friend who made a YouTube half the time is more honest with you than Christiane Amanpour. So maybe that's the source of it, or do you think it's more than that?

MADAR: I think also coming of age after the Iraq war or the ongoing daily debacle of the Afghanistan war, where all these great promises were made about how wonderful this was going to be. We were going to convert the entire Middle East to liberal democracy and it wasn't going to cost us anything, and they'd pay us back oil and it was going to be great. Instead, we have an incredible amount of carnage—you know, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis civilians killed, four and a half thousand American soldiers killed. And this is something that really should have completely discredited neoconservatives, but the neoconservative reach really extends past just the Republicans. There were so many Democrats who supported that; I think if Al Gore had been elected president that pretty much the same thing would have happened. I have a hard time seeing Al Gore saying no to that disaster, and after all he did come out and support the Iraq war before it happened. So there's widespread disenchantment with the war party, and I think that's a beautiful thing.

WOODS: I just had Justin Raimondo on last week, and I was asking him about Iran. For years and years there was war propaganda against Iran, and time after time, it seemed like we were moving inexorably toward war, that the march toward war—which had been rehearsed in Iraq exactly the same way, the same sort of propaganda—was inevitably going to hit us again and it just didn't matter what you or I thought. And a majority of Americans thought Iran had a nuclear program, and you think, how could this possibly be happening again? And yet somehow they wound up not getting that war, and it doesn't look like they're going to get it. What do you think the reason is?

MADAR: Well, you know, I'm pleasantly surprised here.

WOODS: Me too.

MADAR: I've been very critical of the Obama administration. I'm going to show my cards, I'm a left-wing guy who's broad-minded and loves writing for *The American Conservative*, you know, for *The Realist*, the *National Interest* and places like that. But I've been harshly critical of Obama keeping Guantanamo open and escalating the Afghan war and doing the ill-judged Libyan war, but here he is actually showing some leadership and spending political capital to push forward a deal with Iran, that if it goes as it should, it will partially demilitarize the Persian Gulf, make it less of a tinderbox that will spark World War III, and avoid a global conflagration and avoid a war with Iran. And this should be a no-brainer, but it isn't. And fortunately, it seems like people are so weary of war. We saw this with the outcry across the political spectrum against getting involved in Syria's civil war. There seems to be a weariness with so much belligerence, so much calamitous results that people are finally waking up to it. And that's good.

WOODS: It is good. I try to reach out to people on the Right as a way of doing penance for my own past. When I was a college kid I was more or less a Rush Limbaugh neocon and, boy, I advocated all kinds of stupid and evil things. And it's a hard thing to change your mind on that. It's one thing to say, "I was wrong about milk subsidies: we do need them after all!" Well, no real harm done, right? But to say that you advocated every single U.S. military intervention plus 50 others that never occurred, that's a hard thing to look at yourself and admit that you were really, really wrong about it. And when I look today at some of these Tea Party people with their "don't tread on me" flags, and they're going to get themselves out from under the oppression of the central government, they cheerlead for the worst of them, for the most propaganda-fueled, most expensive, most inexcusable and frankly most big government-spawning program of them all, which is the U.S. government's foreign policy.

I would say to them that if the Soviet Union had propagated propaganda of the sort we saw going into the Iraq war, we would never have heard the end of it from Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity that, boy, they're liars and they're making up these WMD stories and they obviously have some other ambitions in Iraq that can't have anything to do with this. But if it's your government, well then you feel like you've got to find rationales to support the propaganda; you've got to dig up evidence supporting propaganda that the regime itself doesn't even believe anymore. It's horrifying.

And so my way of doing penance is to try to change some minds on that side of the aisle. I think I've had a little bit of success here and there.

But let's shift gears here because I don't have you for that much longer and I do want to say just a little bit about your book on Bradley Manning that I mentioned at the beginning when I was introducing you.

Tell us a little bit about that book, but specifically, treat me like I'm 10 years old and I know nothing about Wikileaks or Bradley Manning. Explain what exactly happened and why people would be upset about this rather than cheering.

MADAR: Okay, well, Private Bradley Manning was an Army intelligence officer, just a private first class who enlisted in the military, was deployed to Iraq and saw firsthand what a disaster our war was over there. And working very hard at a forward operating base in the middle of Iraq, and, increasingly horrified by what he was seeing but what was not being reported at home, decided to leak a whole lot of military field reports about Iraq, about Afghanistan and then a couple hundred thousand diplomatic cables as well, so Americans would be able to see what our foreign policy is really all about, what's is truly happening behind the scenes, how decisions are being made and to get the raw, unfiltered truth without any spin or PR about how our wars are going. He tried leaking these documents to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*—they didn't take them, so Manning leaked them to Wikileaks, which is kind of a wholesaler of information to journalists and kind of a new group that has been in the news quite a bit. And when Manning was found out, he was severely punished—she goes by Chelsea Manning now, by the way, so that's why I'm saying Chelsea, but that's another story—

WOODS: Right.

MADAR: ...and was put in solitary confinement against against the military brig's own medical advice, just out of sheer bloody-mindedness, just to make this person as miserable as possible. Finally, released after close to a year in punitive isolation and put on court martial a couple years later and convicted of espionage, of violating the Espionage Act of 1917, an antiquated statute that was retooled by Richard Nixon

as a way to punish domestic leakers and whistleblowers. The impact of all these leaks has been tremendous. There's been hundreds of first-page stories in newspapers around the world. Wikileaks has worked for conservative papers like the *Daily Telegraph* in London, also more left-of-center newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*. And we have a far richer knowledge of how these wars were going, how these counterinsurgency campaigns were going—a true version of events that often clashes with the government official line, believe it or not. And many people have condemned this as something horrible, but many people have also welcomed this as some badly needed truth. We have runaway over-classification in the United States, 95 million documents being classified at last count in 2012. The Manning leak is less than one percent of that, but it's still a very useful beam of light into our foreign policy.

Now the young soldier was sentenced and convicted to 35 years in prison, may get out after eight years. There's a great organization dedicated to freeing Private Manning, In Solidarity with Private Manning, and you can write to her at Fort Leavenworth if you just look up online Private Manning's address.

But this is about secrecy and the terrible consequences of extreme levels of state secrecy. One of the reasons we went into Iraq with such disastrous results was because there was such a thick layer of government secrecy, distortion and lies about the fact of that matter, about the purported weapons of mass destruction, about the purported consequences. And if we had known the truth then, I would hope that we would not have made such a foolish and catastrophic decision, but it's a very bitterly appropriate coda to our Iraq war that this war that began under a cloak of secrecy, distortion and lies ends with the court martial of a truth teller, of a young soldier who was up to her neck in this disaster and tried to get the truth out to the American people.

WOODS: Let me ask you a two-part question to wrap up. What would you say to people who say, look people's lives were put at risk by these leaks? And here's the second part: the state being what it is, it's going to want to keep its secrets. You can't expect it not to punish somebody who reveals those secrets, even if that person is appealing to a higher law. You can't expect that person not to get punished. How would you respond to those?

MADAR: Well, first of all, I think those are both very legitimate questions that should be addressed, and I address them in my book, *The Passion of Bradley Manning*. First of all, there's been a lot of speculation about damage done to human life as a result of these leaks. I find this to be a little bit bizarre, and I find it to be a bit of a scapegoating process. Here you have this calamitous war. It kills not only four and a half thousand Americans, but several hundred thousand Iraqis. Do we really think the problem here that got all these people killed is these leaks that happened towards the end of the war? There's been very little concern expressed in the mainstream U.S. media, and among mainstream U.S. political figures, about the incredible carnage of the Iraq war, but suddenly people pipe up like a whole tabernacle choir, gushing with concern, when it comes to these imaginary deaths that they speculate may have been caused by Chelsea Manning's leaks and by Wikileaks. I think this is humbug; this is hypocrisy. More than three years after these leaks—we're coming on four years—there is no concrete evidence of a single person being harmed. You have a couple foreign reporters who may have had to leave their countries because they were named in the diplomatic cables, but they were granted asylum here in the United States; it worked out pretty well. But there comes a time when you have to stop speculating about damage that may have been done and look at the incredible carnage that has been done for real, and carnage that was perpetrated in large part because of government secrecy and lies, but to try to shift the blame for all of that onto government whistleblowers—well, whistleblowers usually get scapegoated and they usually get blamed for the very wrongs that they're trying to get the word out about, and this is one more sad example of that.

Now, to answer your second question about punishment. I don't think that Chelsea Manning deserves to be punished. I think she suffered more than enough and deserves a full pardon or at the very least a commutation. Military justice is much more supple; it's not the delicate flower that some people seem to think it is. You read in the newspaper constantly of a great amount of sexual assault and rape in the military that goes unpunished. We've also read of massacres perpetrated that go all but unpunished—I'm thinking specifically of the Haditha massacre in Iraq, where 24 civilians were killed execution-style by a Marine Corps unit, and the only penalty that any of these Marines who perpetrated it suffered was a demotion in rank. That's it. No time in the brig, no court martial beyond that. Our military discipline is not going to evaporate if we show some flexibility, especially given the great public value of Private Manning's leaks. I think it's important we recognize the incredible social value to the world and above all to the United States of knowing what our government is doing. The idea that we should have a clue what our government is doing, this isn't some new radical slogan that was invented by Julian Assange or by the Occupy movement. This has long been a central part of our political tradition, and it was James Madison himself who wrote that a popular government without popular information is but a prelude to a tragedy or a farce or perhaps both. But when you're classifying 95 million documents a year, that's what you're getting in your foreign policy and probably a lot of your domestic policy as well: a tragic farce.

WOODS: Chase, I want to close with this, and I think you can see what my preoccupations tend to be. I think sometimes the Left misconstrues the nature of the Tea Party movement. They think it's an anti-government movement. But if it were an anti-government movement, then it would be angrier about the fact that the government lies to them than about the fact that somebody revealed that the government lies to them. Why would that make you angrier than the lies themselves? When push comes to shove on the things that really matter, they will get in line and salute. And I think that some of the evil SOB's that are behind some of the worst of American foreign policy must get a real cackle out of the fact that people who portray themselves as the great body of the resistance—they're going to restore American liberty!—are the ones who are first to get in line like little puppy dogs and accept every bit of propaganda that's fed to them.