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Army Private Bradley Manning was sentenced Wednesday to 35 years in prison and dishonorably discharged for leaking more than 700,000 classified files and videos to WikiLeaks about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and U.S. foreign policy. The sentence is much longer than any punishment given to previous government officials who have leaked information to the media. Manning could be released on parole in about seven years. In a statement released just after the sentencing, Manning has asked President Obama for a pardon. "When I chose to disclose classified information I did so out of a love for my country and a sense of duty to others," Manning said in a statement read by his attorney, David Coombs. "If you deny my request for a pardon, I will serve my time knowing that sometimes you have to pay a heavy price to live in a free society."

**AMY GOODMAN:** A military judge has sentenced Army Private Bradley Manning to 35 years in prison for leaking more than 700,000 classified files and videos to WikiLeaks about the U.S. wars overseas and U.S. foreign policy. Manning's leaks included a video showing a U.S. military helicopter in Iraq shooting at two vans and killing civilians, including two Reuters journalists. Manning's documents were released in an effort to open the eyes of Americans to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and provoke a more intense debate, Manning said.

The 35-year sentence has been widely criticized by human rights group, legal and press freedom groups. The sentence is much longer than any punishment given to previous U.S. government officials who have leaked information to the media. The editors of *The New York Times* described the sentence as excessive, pointing out Manning was sentenced to a longer prison term than Michael Behenna, a U.S. soldier who killed an unarmed Iraqi man who was being questioned. Behenna's original sentence was 25 years; it was then reduced to 15. *The Guardian* compares Manning's sentence to that of Army Reserve Corporal Charles Graner, who was convicted of abusing Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Graner was sentenced to 10 years and released after six and a half.

In Manning's case, Army prosecutors initially sought a sentence of life without parole plus more than a hundred years. With parole, the 25-year-old Manning could be released on parole in about seven years.

On Wednesday, defense attorney David Coombs announced he plans to ask President Obama to pardon Manning. At a news conference outside Fort Meade, Coombs read a statement from Manning.

**DAVID COOMBS:** "The decisions that I made in 2010 were made out of a concern for my country and the world that we live in. Since the tragic events of 9/11, our country has been at war. We've been at war with an enemy that chooses not to meet us on any traditional battlefield, and due to this fact we've had to alter our methods of combating the risks posed to us and our way of life.

"I initially agreed with these methods and chose to volunteer to help defend my country. It was not until I was in Iraq and reading secret military reports on a daily basis that I started to question the morality of what we were doing. It was at this time I realized in our efforts to meet this risk posed to us by the enemy, we have forgotten our humanity. We consciously elected to devalue human life both in Iraq and Afghanistan. When we engaged those that we perceived were the enemy, we sometimes killed innocent civilians. Whenever we killed innocent civilians, instead of accepting responsibility for our conduct, we elected to hide behind the veil of national security and classified information in order to avoid any public accountability.

"In our zeal to kill the enemy, we internally debated the definition of torture. We held individuals at Guantanamo for years without due process. We inexplicably turned a blind eye to torture and executions by the Iraqi government. And we stomached countless other acts in the name of our war on terror.

"Patriotism is often the cry extolled when morally questionable acts are advocated by those in power. When these cries of patriotism drown out any logically based dissension, it is usually the American soldier that is given the order to carry out some ill-conceived mission.

"Our nation has had similar dark moments for the virtues of democracy—the Trail of Tears, the

*Dred Scott*

decision, McCarthyism, and the Japanese-American internment camps—to mention a few. I am confident that many of the actions since 9/11 will one day be viewed in a similar light.

"As the late Howard Zinn once said, 'There is not a flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people.'

"I understand that my actions violated the law. I regret if my actions hurt anyone or harmed the United States. It was never my intent to hurt anyone. I only wanted to help people. When I chose to disclose classified information, I did so out of a love for my country and a sense of duty to others.

"If you deny my request for a pardon, I will serve my time knowing that sometimes you have to pay a heavy price to live in a free society. I will gladly pay that price if it means we could have country that is truly conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all" — and he puts in here — "women and men are created equal."

**AMY GOODMAN:** Attorney David Coombs reading a statement from Bradley Manning yesterday. The statement is part of Manning's plea to President Obama for a pardon.