

President Obama Laid a New Landmine for President-Elect Trump

Tuesday, President Barack Obama commuted the sentence of former U.S. Army Pvt. Bradley Manning, a former military intelligence analyst who shared hundreds of thousands of highly classified documents with WikiLeaks.

The move was considered the laying of yet another potential landmine for President-elect Donald Trump.

Manning, who now identifies as a woman named “Chelsea,” pleaded guilty to distributing more than 700,000 documents illegally as well as video of a 2007 airstrike in Baghdad that killed two journalists. He was sentenced to 35 years in prison in 2013, but Obama reduced that to seven years—most of which has already been served.

He will be released on May 17.

Manning has attempted suicide numerous times while in custody at the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange had pledged to turn himself in on allegations of rape from Sweden if Manning was pardoned—although it’s unclear if he will follow through as a result of Obama’s commutation.

He issued the following statement via WikiLeaks’ official Twitter account:

Thank you to everyone who campaigned for Chelsea Manning’s clemency. Your courage & determination made the impossible possible.

Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) was less celebratory:

Chelsea Manning's treachery put American lives at risk and exposed some of our nation's most sensitive secrets. President Obama now leaves in place a dangerous precedent that those who compromise our national security won't be held accountable for their crimes.

Former Deputy Attorney General Tom Dupree said Obama's move now makes it even more difficult to prosecute Assange for publishing the documents he received from Manning. Commuting the sentence makes it "much tougher to then say we're going to drop the hammer on the person that published that information," he said.

The Manning commutation created an additional problem for the incoming administration. It was part of an announced 209 commutations and 64 pardons, which means Obama has now issued 1,597 grants of commutation over the course of his two terms, the most by any president.

White House Neil Eggleston said:

"[W]e must remember that clemency is an extraordinary remedy, granted only after the President has concluded that a particular individual has demonstrated a readiness to make use of his or her second chance. Only Congress can achieve the broader reforms needed to ensure over the long run that our criminal justice system operates more fairly and effectively in the service of public safety."

Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn (R-Texas) told FOX News that Obama was "undermining our ability on criminal justice reform by granting clemency at an alarming rate." {eo}