



David Coombs, the civilian lawyer representing Bradley Manning at his court martial for supplying WikiLeaks with a trove of US state secrets, has described the soldier's treatment in solitary confinement at Quantico marine base as criminal and a blot on the nation's history.

Making rare comments outside the courtroom, Coombs addressed an audience of Bradley Manning supporters in a Unitarian church in Washington on Monday night and lashed out at the military hierarchy for allowing the intelligence analyst to be subjected to nine months of harsh suicide prevention regime against the advice of doctors. "Brad's treatment at Quantico will forever be etched into our nation's history as a disgraceful moment in time," he said.

"Not only was it stupid and counter-productive, it was criminal. An entire group of individuals, who I have no doubt were honourable, chose to turn a blind eye to how he was being treated ... They cared about something more: the media impact."

Coombs made his criticism in his first and what will probably his only speech in a civilian setting since he became Manning's lawyer two years ago. He explained to the audience that he has consciously avoided all public engagements and interviews with the press partly on Manning's instructions and partly because the soldier "deserved an attorney entirely focused on the courtroom".

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