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Dear Chelsea,

As you may know, I am a journalist, who has covered your case quite extensively. I became interested in covering each development after writing several stories on the U.S. Embassy cables you released. I recognized the importance of covering the source of incredible information, which had made it possible for me to write stories that helped establish my name in media.

Well after you were mistreated at the Marine Corps Base Quantico brig and transferred to Fort Leavenworth, I joined Firedoglake and committed myself to reporting on each stage of your court-martial. Firedoglake has since shut down, and I have joined some of its alumni to co-found a new organization called Shadowproof, which is where our correspondence will be published.

I read a number of interviews you have done, as well as columns you have written for The Guardian, in order to prepare this letter.

What I am immediately struck by when I read your statements or columns is how your life has been a constant struggle to be yourself.

The United States military, in particular, is an institution that breaks down individuals and then builds them back up so they may fit into a unit. However, cultural doctrines of masculinity, which have dominated the military, did not allow you to be the trans woman you are, and you had to hide your true self to a degree that was damaging to your health.

On August 22, 2013, in what you have described as a moment of empowerment, you came out to the world as a trans woman right after a military judge sentenced you to 35 years in prison. "Nobody can control or define our identities unless we let them, and so I chose to come out and to define myself—nothing more," you wrote.

However, the struggle continues from within the walls of a military prison. Though you successfully won the right to gender-confirming health care, the Army will not let you grow out your hair. In what other ways does this lifelong struggle continue in prison? And how have you sought out additional moments of empowerment in order to manage this struggle?

The U.S. government generally disapproves of prisoners, who seek to become or remain empowered individuals while serving sentences. This is especially the case when prisoners engage in hunger strikes to protest their confinement conditions.

I wonder if some of the Army's opposition to granting you hormone treatment goes beyond policies, which force trans persons into being straight men or women. Even though hormone treatment is health care that should not be withheld from anyone and you clearly needed it, maybe the Army interpreted your request as an act of resistance and did not want to let you have greater ability to define yourself.

The punishment you experienced for possessing an expired tube of toothpaste and LGBTQ/political literature seemed like a decision by officers at Leavenworth to push back against your continued efforts to define yourself. Whether it is your speech on Twitter or in The Guardian or what you choose to read in prison, the Army found an opportunity to add what they construed as misconduct to your permanent record and hopefully use that to further control you.

In current news, former high-ranking CIA officials have released a book called Rebuttal, which purports to respond to the Senate intelligence committee report and defends CIA torture. One of the pieces of literature, which led to your punishment, was the torture report released last December. What do you think about the irony of having your copy of the torture report confiscated while former officials are able to talk openly about their involvement in torture without any reasonable fear of prosecution?

Shifting to your court-martial, you wrote in your column on the years since you were jailed that you were convinced the U.S. Army prosecutors "did not believe the treason arguments they made" against you, even as the prosecutors spoke them. Why do you think that?

Some of the worst statements made about you were related to the "aiding the enemy" charge. During closing argument, prosecutors said you were an "anarchist," "hacker," and a "traitor." The prosecutors

directly challenged your patriotism by twisting an exchange between you and a superior officer about the flag into an example of anti-Americanism.

The prosecutors accused you of breaking ranks with your nation. That said, do you believe the aggressive nature of these statements in military court were made to compensate for the fact that they recognized, on some level, there was some merit to the widespread criticism against the “aiding the enemy” charge?

I will end on a lighter note. Even though I made the decision to focus on journalism, I graduated from college with a Film/Video degree. I spend a lot of time following film.

What, if you have any, are your favorite movies? Is there anything you watched when you were growing up that had an impact on you? And, out of sheer curiosity, have you not had the joy of watching a movie since you were deployed in Baghdad?

I appreciate you taking the time to correspond with me, and I will anxiously await your reply.

Best,

Kevin Gosztola