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### Interview with Glenn Greenwald

**Intro:** Glenn Greenwald is a former constitutional lawyer, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and the author of several best-sellers including "Liberty and Justice for some" and "No place to hide, Edward Snowden, the NSA and the US surveillance state". He is acclaimed as one of the top 25 political commentators by The Atlantic. One of America's top 10 opinion writers by Newsweek and one of the top global thinkers for 2013 by Foreign Policy. He was a columnist for The Guardian until October 2013 and is a founding editor of The Intercept. Ladies and Gentlemen: Glenn Greenwald.

**Zain Raza:** Hi, Glenn. How is it going in Brazil?

**Glenn Greenwald:** It's going great. I'm a little bit jealous that I'm not there with you in Munich, it's one of my favorite cities in the world but otherwise I'm doing well.

**Zain Raza:** Perfect, I tracked you down twice when you were here and I was able to manage two interviews but this is the third one, so let's just begin with Donald J. Trump, there's this perception about Trump that he's a madman, he's unorthodox, he's breaking from conventional American politics and he's not following in many issues the same line as his predecessors. So, what is your take: Is Donald Trump breaking from orthodoxy, is he a continuation or is he a mixed bag?

**Glenn Greenwald:** I think it's important to separate the stylistic or rhetorical analysis with regard to that question from the substantive and policy analysis. So, obviously it is a matter of personality, it is a matter of rhetoric and it is a matter of style. Trump is something unlike we've seen before in term of somebody occupying the Oval Office and being the representative of this vast power that the United States continues to wield in the world. The way he speaks, the things he says, his refusal to abide by protocols and conventions. But if you actually look at the policies that he has overseen and implemented and even the way in which he defends those policies I think that it's far more a continuation and a byproduct of American political culture than something unrecognizable or aberrational.

There's a lot of people who want to pretend that what he is doing is some kind of radical break from the American tradition, because they're embarrassed, because his rhetorical newness does

sort of take the mask off the face of what the reality of the United States in the world is and so they want to pretend that this is something all new. And I remember when Trump had General Sisi of Egypt to the White House the American media decided to pretend that this was something brand new that we had never seen before. An American president embracing a tyrant! And of course American presidents have embraced tyrants. It's been central to American foreign policy for decades and I think you see you see that over and over. There is a lot of pretense that what Trump is is new but the reality is he's far more a continuation than a deviation from American political history.

**Zain Raza:** Let's dig deeper into that for a second, Glenn. So, what about the surveillance state? In 2013 you exposed the entire NSA cache that Edward Snowden had leaked and some of the things were like millions of Germans are being... their data has been collected without their consent. Wikileaks also from this cache revealed that our chancellor's cell phone is being spied on by our so-called allies and this investigation was dropped last year. So, how has the state of mass surveillance been under Donald Trump and what do you think how Germany has reacted to this generally up to this point?

**Glenn Greenwald:** So, I think, that's, you know, a great example of what it is that I was just saying is this narrative in our reporting that we were able to do, showing that there was this massive scheme conducted and constructed largely in the dark to spy on the entire internet including hundreds of millions of Germans and other people around the world, was not something that was done by Donald Trump but was done by his predecessor George Bush and then especially Barack Obama and the war crimes that Wikileaks exposed in Afghanistan and Iraq and in other places as a result of the brave leaks of Chelsea Manning were not crimes committed under Donald Trump, they were crimes committed under George Bush and Barack Obama and so, I think that when you look at the actual apparatus of National Security that the United States continues to be shaped and governed by has changed very little under Donald Trump. There was some early indications from him, rhetorically, that he intended to actually restrain a lot of this militarism, restrain a lot of the imperial behaviour, that people on the left, and even increasingly some on the right, have been so critical of, I think that although there is some rhetorical indications from Trump early on that he intended to radically restrain or alter the role that the US plays in the world, that if you look at what the US is doing in the world militarily, in terms of the CIA, in terms of the NSA, it's very much unchanged.

**Zain Raza:** So, since we're at state surveillance, let's move on to corporate surveillance. Facebook, as you know, handed out 87 million users' data to Cambridge Analytica, which then gave it out for political purposes to Donald Trump's campaign. So, I mean, it's not really a deviation if you look at the principle that's at play, giving data without your consent, because your revelations revealed in 2013, you presented slides, which showed how corporations are willingly giving data to the NSA. Can you comment on this scandal and also generally on the state of affairs of privacy of individuals?

**Glenn Greenwald:** Well, I guess I'm always a little bit surprised whenever there's surprise about the fact that large Silicon Valley companies don't actually care about our privacy. This is, I think in general inherent to how corporations think, to the extent we can talk about corporations how they reason. They're interested in profit motives and not social values and in fact there are laws in the United States and also in various countries in Europe that require corporate managers to think first and foremost about corporate profit and how to maximize it and not think about how to maximize social values. So, it would be very surprising if Silicon Valley companies, the largest and most powerful corporations human history has ever known

had decided at some point that they were going to sacrifice corporate profit in order to protect social values. And as you suggested a lot of the reporting that we were able to do showed that these Silicon Valley companies, particularly the biggest ones, Google, Facebook, Yahoo, Apple, Microsoft, were actively and aggressively collaborating with the US government and it's for surveillance, allies around the world, in the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, when they were able to do that without anybody knowing about it.

I think what has actually changed as a result of the Snowden reporting is that these companies now do take greater steps in order to protect people's privacy, not because Eric Schmidt at Google or Mark Zuckerberg at Facebook suddenly woke up and decided actually, you know what, we kind of are wrong and we should value privacy more. It's because people around the world began to be worried about what it would mean if they were using Facebook and they were using Google, and Facebook executives and Google executives were very worried that social media companies in Germany and Brazil and Korea would be able to tell the next generation of internet users: don't use Facebook and Google because they're going to give your data to the government, the US government, use ours instead because they'll protect your privacy.

So, because of those commercial pressures these companies actually have been implementing some meaningful privacy protections but at the same time now this is the war that the US government, the UK government, governments around the world are on the one hand trying to pressure social media companies to give them as much data as they want when they don't, they get publicly accused of being aiders and abettors of terrorists as the US and the UK governments have done with Facebook and Google when they refuse to turn over data and you see now Facebook starting to do things like weaken encryption for Whatsapp, which caused the founder of Whatsapp just recently, this week in fact, to resign from the company and leave the board of Facebook.

But on the other hand you still have, you know, tens of millions of people around the world, I would say principally the country where this is true the most is in Germany because of the history of digital privacy, but also in lots of other countries including where I am now, in Brazil, and the United States, where people are unwilling to use technology companies that they believe that those companies are going to undermine their privacy and that's really the central war that's taking place right now, it's the war for public opinion, not because these companies care about public opinion in and of itself but because they perceive it as a threat to their profitability if they're perceived as being privacy violators.

**Zain Raza:** You recently wrote a piece about Facebook's subordination in terms of the Israeli government as well as the government of the United States in deleting accounts of people who are on the sanction list as well as suppressing activism. Can you elaborate on that please?

**Glenn Greenwald:** Sure. So, I think there is this interesting debate taking place and it's taking place on the left, the global left, about the extent to which we want governments and corporations, Silicon Valley corporations, to control and regulate and censor the political content that is available for us to see. And I think there's always this appeal for people who want to support censorship which is, well, I believe that if we empower Facebook executives or Twitter officials or government officials to regulate speech, under the guise that it's hate speech or fake news, the kinds of opinions that I dislike and that I think are threatening or that I think are misleading are going to be suppressed and therefore society will be better.

And that's an appealing way to think, but I think it's an extremely dangerous and usually misguided way to think, because usually the people who exercise power and who are going to be able to control what we see and we don't see aren't people who think the way that you think, if you're on the left for example. They're not going to be looking to censor Israelis who were cheering for genocide or apartheid in Gaza and they're not looking for people in the United States who are calling for Iran to be bombed as Twitter is offering every single day or for minorities to be attacked, they're going to cater to the powerful. And the powerful in the case of the Middle East for example is not the Palestinians but Israel.

And so Facebook officials have been meeting with the Israelis, whoever the Israeli government tells Facebook is an inciter of violence and terrorism get's their account suspended, their account deleted, that has included scholars, it's included journalists in the West Bank. That Facebook is essentially being subservient to the dictates of the Israeli government. We've seen the same thing with the United States. If you are a group that the United States decides to call a terrorist organization, which in the past has included things like the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela, then Facebook executives and Twitter executives will censor political content. But if you're somebody who wants to cheer Donald Trump or call for additional violence in the Middle East, you won't be censored.

And so I think we need to be extremely careful if we believe in internet freedom about not being tricked into supporting censorship based on this lovely idea that the views that we think are violent and we think are dangerous are going to be suppressed because in almost every case the opposite is going to happen. It's the views that you like, the views that you support that are going to end up being suppressed. In the case of Facebook, censoring Palestinians from the internet at the behest of the Israeli government is a perfect illustration of that danger.

**Zain Raza:** Since we're in the Middle East, let's talk about Syria. There are so many conflicting reports, chemical attacks by Jaysh al-Islam, a radical, extremist Islamic group, I don't call it Islam, but let's just put it that way since the media does right now. And also then there's Assad attacking. What do you think should be the conclusion here on a policy framework? Should the western governments intervene forcefully in these cases?

**Glenn Greenwald:** So I think it's very difficult to know exactly what's going on in Syria, in part because it's always difficult to know exactly what's taking place in a very active war zone. Especially when each side has foreign proxies that are supporting it and that are behind it as is the case in the war in Syria. Obviously any decent human being looks at what has happened to Syria over past six years with horror and disgust. It's one of the world's greatest humanitarian tragedies.

At the same time the fact that something is taking place that is heinous and awful doesn't mean that any solution that's proposed will actually make it better. Often times the solutions that are proposed make things worse. And so I don't pretend to have the answers for how to resolve the conflict in Syria, but what I do know is that every time western governments proclaim that they are going to militarily intervene in other countries in the name of humanitarianism, exactly the opposite results happen, they make things worse in all instances. Or virtually all instances from a humanitarian perspective. (applause)

And, you know, I don't think that should be surprising, because the reason the US government spends more than the next 12 nations combined on its military is not because it wants to spread freedom and democracy around the world. Humanitarianism is not actually

the motive for that. And the reason NATO exists and occasionally or more than occasionally starts wars and bombs people is not because they are trying to bring freedom and democracy to people around the world who are suffering under tyranny. The reason those things exist is because that is what bestows power on western nations to let them manipulate the world for their own interest. And that's always going to be what western intervention is about, humanitarianism is the pretext, it's the costume, it's the dressing in which it's wrapped up. So no matter what your views on Syria are, no matter who you think are the primary culprits, the one thing I know for certain is that US military action, which by the way would be led by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces whose name is Donald Trump, is not going to make things better for people in Syria.

**Zain Raza:** So let's switch to other regions in the Middle East. Let's talk about Gaza and Yemen particularly. How would you compare the reaction that happens in Syria in contrast to these two places. Let's start with Gaza.

**Glenn Greenwald:** So, there's this really interesting paradox that I think we see in western discourse all the time. Which is that atrocities committed by allies of western governments are typically ignored, or worse, justified. Whereas atrocities committed by enemies of the United States and NATO are screamed about and protested and highlighted. And so if the Russians drop a bomb in Syria that kills civilians, that generates intense media coverage and denunciation. But if the Saudis bomb as they so often do civilian facilities in Yemen on purpose that kills scores of women and children and innocent men, and particularly even more so when the Israelis just shoot unarmed protesters in the head or the back using snipers there's very little coverage of that and even less denunciation.

And you know you can actually, I guess, make the argument that if you're a citizen of a western country you ought to be condemning both of those equally, you ought to be condemning when the Russians kill people equally to when the United States and its allies do. But to me actually I think there's a much more compelling moral principle which is that we ought to be most concerned about the evil committed not by governments thousands of miles away from us over which we exercise no influence, for which we have no responsibility and which we cannot change, but by our own governments who are engaging in these atrocities in our name. And so as an American citizen and as an American journalist, it isn't that I value certain lives over other lives, I ask myself the question, what is it that I can do the most about. And what I can do the most about is my own government's support for incredibly tyrannical and murderous governments like the one in Saudi Arabia and like the one in Israel. And we have utterly reversed that because that's what propaganda is. Propaganda is about convincing a citizenry that your side is the moral one and the other side is the immoral one, and the way you accomplish that is by ignoring the atrocities committed by your own side.

What Saudi Arabia is doing in Yemen I think is probably the worst humanitarian atrocity and what the Israelis have done to Palestinians generally and the people in Gaza specifically over the last five, six decades is probably the greatest immoral atrocity of the last half of the 20th century and early part of the 21st century. And the United States government, and for that matter your government in Munich, and governments throughout western Europe are directly responsible for all of that because they support and protect and enable and empower the governments that are responsible for that, and that ought to be our main focus. (applause)

**Zain Raza:** I want to talk about Russia and specifically about Russiagate. And you have done a great deal of work exposing the debacles of corporate media and their false reporting about

Russian interference in the election. There was a great amount of concern in Germany as well as France about Russian interference, it didn't turn out to be true. The director of the Digital Society in Germany said nothing happened. In France, it was the same case by the head of the cyber security, basically Russia did nothing. But yet, Germany is increasing its military presence, it's actually taking a role and trying to increase its military budget, trying to reach this two percent target of NATO. And also talking about placing its presence in the eastern bloc which basically means, in other words, in front of Russia's nose. So could you talk about Russiagate and the implications it has on democracy and our society?

**Glenn Greenwald:** So it's hard for me to express to people who don't live in the United States and who don't follow United States political debate on a daily basis just how utterly insane and deranged Americans have become about Russia. The person to whom you just spent the last hour listening, Dr. Jill Stein, is widely regarded not by fringe lunatics in American politics but by the most mainstream political and media figures in all parties to be a Russian agent, like they actually think she works for the Kremlin. That's how completely insane they've become.

And if you ask them for evidence for that they'll say that she once went to a dinner in Moscow that Putin attended for about six minutes along with dozens of other international peace activists around the world. This kind of guilt by association and this kind of hysteria and conspiracy that drove the entire Cold War when it came to American propaganda about Moscow has reared its head but in a much I think more toxic and irrational way, because there was actually a communist movement in the latter half of the 20th century that was the opposite of what the American philosophy was and they were two huge major countries opposing one another around the world. Russia is nothing like that. Russia is the eighth largest economy in the world, that's actually just behind Italy. It has very few global ambitions beyond its immediate neighborhood. To try and convince people that Russia poses some sort of grave threat to the West to the point where we need to build our military budgets up is insanity but it's exactly what western political discourse has become.

You know, if you look at the insanity of it in Germany, I think it becomes particularly vivid, I mean there were two of the most horrific wars fought in the 20th century because of tensions between Germany and Russia. The Cold War came close to virtually annihilating a species because of tensions between Moscow and Washington. Countries that continue to have thousands of nuclear-tipped missiles pointed at one another's cities using very archaic Cold War triggers, trigger systems that could easily go off through misperception and miscommunication.

So the idea of playing games with tensions between Russia and western countries, especially given how NATO has virtually encircled Russia by moving all the way up to its eastern borders, exactly how NATO promised not to do when Gorbachev agreed to allow for the reunification of Germany. Very provocative behavior on the part of the West continually, it makes it extraordinary to watch American political discourse become obsessed with ratcheting up tensions. It's one of the most dangerous things I've ever seen and it's also one of the most despicable because the real reason for it, the real reason why this is happening is because democrats in Washington still cannot accept responsibility for the fact that they lost to a person who basically is a game show host.

They don't want to do any kind of introspection about why they collapsed as a national party. That's true of parties in Western Europe as well. It's always easiest to blame a foreign villain,

to try and create a foreign monster that you get your population to focus on so that they forget about the problems and corruptions of your own country. And in the best of cases it's a deceitful thing to do because it buries the real problems that we have. But when you're playing games with nuclear-armed powers that have a history of starting world wars and that came close to dropping nuclear bombs on one another it's one of the most morally reprehensible things I've seen in my twelve years of covering politics as a journalist.  
(applause)

**Zain Raza:** So what does the assumption that Putin somehow magically from his basement of his castle interfered through twitter bots and everything and was able to bring Donald Trump in power? Has Donald Trump enacted policies that have benefited Russia in any way?

**Glenn Greenwald:** Right, so okay first of all let's just look at the premises of this for a second, right? So we hear constantly the overriding media narrative that Trump is a moron, that Trump is an idiot, that Trump probably has mental health problems, that he has dementia, that he barely even knows where he is, all of which are reasonable things to think if you pay attention to how he speaks and what he says. And so at the same time the argument gets put beside that Vladimir Putin, this kind of global mastermind, decided to interfere in the US election and needed Donald Trump to conspire and collude with him. I mean if the Russians were going to interfere in the 2016 election, why would they need Donald Trump to help them? What possible services could he provide? What kind of aid and assistance could he do? Was he masterminding the hacking? Was he plotting how to distribute the information? The whole theory kind of collapses onto itself when you think about what it is that they're typically saying.

But even if you look at what Trump has done since he's been in office, right? So the argument originally was that Trump was sort of captive to the Kremlin in part out of gratitude for the fact that they helped him win but also because the crazier people in American politics were saying that they actually have blackmail material over him. They have a video tape of him engaging in sexually incriminating acts and all kinds of phantasies that they got from television and movies and novels about the Cold War where the Russians blackmail people. And that Trump was essentially a puppet literally of Putin, that he pulls the strings and Trump does what he wants.

Since Trump has been in office he did something that Obama refused to do in Syria which is bomb the Russians' client state in Syria. He has also done something much more important to the Russians which Obama refused to do which is arm anti-Russian elements in Ukraine with lethal weapons. Something that Putin finds genuinely threatening and genuinely provocative. He has expelled Russian diplomats, he has imposed sanctions on oligarchs very close to the Kremlin and to Vladimir Putin. So if you were to try and find evidence for any of this, the idea that Trump is captive to Putin or that the Kremlin controls the White House now, not only would you find no evidence, what you would actually find is that Trump has been more confrontational with Moscow than Barack Obama was, which I say not with any admiration but with criticism, and I think a major part of the reason why is because the climate that has been created in Washington is such that like with Jill Stein, unless you advocate dropping bombs on Moscow, you're going to be smeared as a Russian agent.

And you know I always say this and I guess there's a part of it that's exaggerated for dramatic effect, but I actually do genuinely believe it, the more evidence you provide for any conspiracy theorist that their conspiracy theory is false, the more they are going to take that

evidence and use it as proof their conspiracy theory is true. So every time Trump bombs Assad they'll say *Oh Putin told him where to bomb. It didn't really do much, it didn't kill enough people for us to be convinced.* When Trump provides lethal aid to Ukraine they'll say Putin told him to do that to throw everyone off the track. I honestly think that if tomorrow Trump bombed Moscow they would say *Oh Putin told him which targets to bomb.* Because it's become this religion that anybody who descends from American political orthodoxy, anybody who challenges the democratic party and Donald Trump himself are basically controlled by this mastermind that is straight out of a James Bond movie named Vladimir Putin. And it's really become a sickness in the West that is smearing the reputation of people like Jill Stein but also justifying massive military budgets and all kinds of very dangerous geopolitical policies around the world.

**Zain Raza:** So let's get to some public questions. What can an average citizen do to avoid the invasion of his privacy?

**Glenn Greenwald:** Well the good news about that is as I said earlier first of all there are actually now internet services including Facebook and Google that do use greater encryption that does provide genuine protection for your privacy. So a lot of times you're using encryption without even realizing it. You know to some extent that was always the case if you accessed your bank account, if you bought a plane ticket, you are using encrypted websites just by default. And that has become true now, if you pick up your telephone and message someone on Whatsapp or other services then you're automatically protected by encryption.

But there are still steps you can take beyond that are becoming increasingly less difficult. There are telephone apps such as Signal and Telegram that allow a good deal of privacy protection, there are ways to communicate and to browse the internet, such as the Tor browser. There are encryption programs on email, you know five years ago when I was first contacted by Edward Snowden you had to be a very sophisticated and advanced computer expert in order to use a lot of these programs and I remember in 2015 Snowden in an interview said that the goal of the hacking community and the privacy community has to be to make these encryption tools meet the Glenn Greenwald standard by which he means that basically any idiot has to be able to use them. And that is essentially what has happened.

Increasingly they're getting easier to use and so every day it's easier for you to build a wall between your own privacy and your private communications and what you do on the internet and the ability of governments and non-state actors to be able to monitor what it is you're doing and it's incumbent upon people whose jobs need security and safety and confidentiality like doctors and journalists and human rights activists to use them but also for ordinary citizens to just make it that much harder for governments around the world to use the internet as a spying tool.

**Zain Raza:** So the next question. How can we break through the corporate news domination of our country, in brackets meaning USA?

**Glenn Greenwald:** Well you know it's interesting I think that if you go back and look at some of the early commentary about the internet, why people were so excited about this incredible invention that it really obviously is. One of the most significant human innovations in centuries. One of the main reasons was it would give human beings the power to disseminate information and communicate with one another without having to rely upon huge corporate institutions. And to some extent that has not happened. In part because these

corporate institutions now control and own the internet as we were talking about before with Facebook and Google being so dominant. In part because of what made Edward Snowden come forward, which is the fact that governments around the world have turned the internet into this unprecedented means of coercion and control as opposed to what the promise was, which was that it would be this unparalleled tool of liberation and democratization.

But at the same time it has actually empowered people around the world in ways that were previously unimaginable. I think the best example is the world's understanding of what Israel does do in Gaza. Ten years ago, when the Israelis would decide to just drop bombs indiscriminately on Gaza and slaughter civilians they would allow only their favorite western reporters working for large corporate media outlets into Gaza who would immediately recite the line of the IDF that they only killed Hamas or that they were bombing Hamas or that they had bombed a school because Hamas has turned it into – just lies, blatant lies. And that was the only way we could get our information, we had to rely upon the corporate media.

Now even in population purposely deprived, extremely poor like Gazans, 1.8 million Gazans have cell phones and internet upload links. And so when the Israelis randomly shoot protesters who are unarmed or when they bomb schools, we see footage of the truth. And it has changed how people think of the relationship between the Israelis and the Palestinians, it's much harder for Israel to lie to the world because they can no longer control what we're seeing about their actions the way they could just even 10 or 15 ago as a result of the internet.

And that's why to me fighting to keep the internet free, not asking corporations and governments to censor and control it, remains the central fight. Because it does remain one of the most promising tools in human history for us to be able to organize together, to disseminate information and to undermine and subvert the most powerful institutions and the last thing we ought to be doing is asking those institutions to be increasing their control over the internet. (applause)

**Zain Raza:** And the last question. Could you talk about the piece where you talk about homelessness and dogs in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, what culture has developed out of that?

**Glenn Greenwald:** Sure I mean this is a personal project for myself and my husband, we've been rescuing dogs for many years, and I think we have 24 of our own. This is the first speech I have ever given from my house where they weren't barking, people are going to complain about that because they love my dog barking. And about five years ago we began focusing on the very substantial homeless population here in Rio de Janeiro which lives on the street very frequently with their pets. And we began noticing that the bond that forms between homeless people and their homeless animals is much more profound and much greater and much deeper than the average relationship of people who love their pets, in large parts because neither have anything else and they have only each other.

And there's now amazing social science research on this, proving that this is true. And so we recently decided we wanted to tap into that energy by building and developing a shelter that takes care of abandoned animals but at the same time only employs homeless people who have lived on the streets and shown this love for animals. And so it's a project that is simultaneously caring for abandoned animals but at the same time employing homeless people, helping them open bank accounts, teaching them how to rent an apartment and then get off the street and find permanent employment in some model that we hope to use around the world because it's helping two populations that typically are neglected, abandoned

animals and homeless people.

And you know I think that it's very important that in your politics that you embrace important principles of humanitarianism and peace but at the same time I think it's very important that those not stay abstract, that you practice those principles in your life as well. And the more we just find ways to spread those values, just in small ways, the more the world will improve and you know I usually get asked at these kinds of functions, like what is it that we can do to change these things and for me the answer is always focus first on your own individual behavior and ask what you can be doing more of to make the world a better place. (applause)

**Zain Raza:** Glenn Greenwald, co-founder of The Intercept and investigative journalist, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Glenn Greenwald:** Thank you for inviting me, I appreciate it. Thank you everybody.

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