



Max Blumenthal on the imperial NGOs that ignore Julian Assange - and the billionaires behind them

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Max Blumenthal (MB): Thank you to the Courage Foundation for having the courage to let me talk. I don't know how it's going to go over, and thank you to my computer for dying and killing my presentation. I blame the CIA and the Mossad. [Laughter] Thank you again, everybody, for coming out on a Saturday afternoon, I probably wouldn't have, I'd probably still be asleep or something.

And thank you to the jury. Thank you to the jury that just refused to go along with a federal judge in a D.C. court to convict the embassy protection. For, now we have a mistrial, at least four people who stood up against the phony coup and white collar mafia of Juan Guaido and the imperial forces behind him and said “no pasaran”. So thank you to the jury. I'd love to say thank you to the jury at some big journalism awards ceremony for all the great work we're doing at the Grayzone. Never going to happen. I know how it is and that's actually kind of what I might talk about today.

I want to talk about WikiLeaks, but I also want to talk about who's not talking about WikiLeaks, who's not talking about Julian Assange and why they're not talking about him. Well, one reason they're not talking about him is years of public demonization. He's been branded as an anti-woman rapist, a lunatic colluding with a psychologically dysphoric trans national security criminal, a far right libertarian, a far left anarchist, an anti-democratic Russian asset, wrecking the otherwise perfectly democratic Democratic Party. And a hacker, in the words of the inappropriately named Ecuadorian president Lenin Moreno, who is accused of spreading feces on the walls of the besieged embassy that served as his home and de facto prison for so many years. And after all this, now that he's in Belmarsh Prison, a maximum security complex with high-level criminals, Julian Assange is finally being ignored by the mainstream media and public officials. Well, this isn't thanks to any Bob Dylan-esque wish to return to anonymity after years in the spotlight. And unlike Dylan, Assange has been determined to communicate to the international public with a clear, decidedly ungarbled message, demanding transparency. And today, the message is a message about survival, not just of Julian Assange, but of critical, skeptical, courageous, adversarial journalism itself. And it is a message that we have to carry to our officials against his extradition.

I want to talk about another reason for this silence. It is partly thanks to malice against Assange, true. But it's also due to a political ecosystem of press freedom NGOs, investigative

and supposedly open-source journalistic consortiums, human rights groups and "civil society activists" funded by US-regime-tied billionaires and corporate multinationals, which function exclusively in the interests of American empire, but which operate behind the language of solidarity, rights and justice co-opted from the global left.

This network is silent about Julian. In 1991, Washington Post reporter David Ignatius -- no wild eyed anti-imperialist described the birth of a new post-Cold War apparatus that operated through NGOs, like the National Endowment for Democracy, and private billionaires to do what the US intelligence services used to do covertly, but this time in the public. As cut outs, this ecosystem of billionaire-backed imperial NGOs and the opposition movements they supported has been exposed in glaring fashion through Cablegate, the Stratfor leaks and many other publications that appeared on the uniquely securitised platform of WikiLeaks. And today this ecosystem that I'm describing, this imperial ecosystem, they want you to know about authoritarianism in Russia, authoritarianism in China, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Wherever, whoever is targeted for regime change, but not in the West, where we're defending the rules-based post-Cold War international order by sending Border Patrol tactical teams into sanctuary cities, building the Wall and sanctioning the huddled masses on the other side into oblivion -- when we're not removing their governments through coups innocuously described as "color revolutions". They want you to know about millions and millions of Uighurs in concentration camps in China, the blood of hundreds of journalists spattered all over the designer shirt of the richest man in the world, Vladimir Putin, and the babies dying in chigger-infested Venezuelan incubators, while Nicolas Maduro samples delectable slabs of steak sliced by Salt Bae.

But with a few notable exceptions, they don't want you to hear about Julian Assange. This ecosystem draws its resources from the endlessly growing fortunes of Silicon Valley billionaires, regarded by many as altruistic liberals. I'll name a few now.

Craig Newmark, the Craigslist founder who almost single handedly destroyed alternative print media by depriving it of its main source of revenue in classified advertising. So by the early 2000s, if you wanted to procure a used George Foreman grill, or a massage with release, you went to Craigslist, not the Village Voice or its print counterparts, which you could pick up for free in any newspaper box. Now Newmark is building up a new media after tearing down the old one. He has his name on a journalism school down the street - (I think at the new school). He's funding an assortment of media, fact-checking organizations like Poynter. He's funding press freedom outfits like the Committee to Protect Journalists -- which I'll talk about in detail -- the Alliance for Securing Democracy, an ironically named Russiagate media censorship outfit that recently falsely smeared the Grayzone as a state-backed media account. I'm going to take 10 minutes. I'm sorry. [response] Thank you. All right. We're on a strict schedule. I'll make it. He's also funding Mother Jones in the name of waging an information war against Russia, with a million dollars to Mother Jones, who rolls in her grave.

Newmark is joined by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar, who funds many of the same organizations in an eye-popping array of new media outfits that have become repositories for mysteriously obtained leaks and supposedly open-source journalism that provides fuel to the engine of regime change. One of them is the International Consortium for Investigative Journalists, which recently published the China Leaks to support the case for sanctions based

on the notion that Beijing is imprisoning millions of Uyghurs based on their ethnicity in concentration camps. I can't go into detail with the time I have about that, but Omidyar is best known as the founder of The Intercept, an adversarial branded media organization that owned the Snowden NSA files. While still the home of one of the most courageous journalists in the West – Glenn Greenwald – whose indictment read like a carbon copy of Julian's, five years since its foundation, The Intercept has abandoned and buried the Snowden NSA files and has become a repository for Syria regime change propaganda and published the oddly timed Iran leaks, spun as an exposé of Iran's evildoing in Iraq just days before the US assassination of Qasem Soleimani. In 2019, Omidyar showed his hand when he provided seed money to Iraq War neocon Bill Kristol's The Bulwark, which recently described supporters of Bernie Sanders in no uncertain terms as Nazi brownshirts.

Chief among the billionaires, David Ignatius named in his original 1991 report, was someone whose name I'm afraid to mention for fear of being labeled an anti-Semite and a crazy conspiracy theorist. Well there's conspiracy theories and there are conspiracy facts, and this person is George Soros. Am I going to disappear? [laughter] Soros, who's become a prolific funder of media organizations through his Open Society institutes, democratic politicians Obama, Hillary, and super-PACs like PACRONYM, part of the acronym dark money operation that spun out the Shadow Inc. app that wrecked the Iowa caucuses. By mistake. I'm saying by mistake, you can laugh. Come on, you don't believe me? What?!

Most importantly, he sponsors an array of opposition parties and NGOs in countries targeted by the US, which were exposed in Cablegate. These billionaires have joined with the National Endowment for Democracy, the US government's chief arm for sponsoring regime change to establish an organization that I see as an answer or a counterpoint to the threat of WikiLeaks and a response to the crisis of trust that the US intelligence services experienced after the Iraq war. It's called Bellingcat, it is a collection of supposedly open source digital detectives, led by noted videogame expert Eliot Higgins, who has labeled Assange “Noel Edmonds with botox and a dye job”, and said that “Ecuador, through its partnership with the CIA cutout UC-Global to surveil Assange, was merely spying on Julian Assange's wanking schedule. Some real solidarity there. Whenever Russia, Syria or another global evildoer is accused of some chemical crime, this outfit produces open source findings that immediately demonstrate their guilt in places like Douma, Syria, where the Syrian government was accused of a chemical attack that justified US missile strikes on the country. They're then given awards by the press freedom organizations funded by the billionaires and NATO-aligned governments that comprise the imperial ecosystem I just described. It is all so much more credible-seeming than sourcing information to unnamed US intelligence officials or to defectors with code names like Curveball.

Thanks to WikiLeaks, we learned that not everyone at the OPCW, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, was comfortable with the organization's findings on Douma. That according to two whistleblowers, the entire incident in April 2018 was staged by US- and UK-backed opposition groups and the Saudi-backed extremist armed opposition to make the case for war. We were lied to. Again.

The Committee to Protect Journalists is the major press freedom organization at the heart of this imperial NGO ecosystem. It is funded by the aforementioned billionaires and corporations, and in the past, it has advocated for Julian Assange. But at this year's CPJ Gala Awards ceremony [I'm almost done] its executives explicitly refused to name Assange as an

imprisoned or persecuted journalist. Instead, CPJ honored Lucy Piñeta and Miguel Mora, directors of the 100% Noticias tabloid station in Nicaragua and US-backed leaders of the violent coup that aimed to remove the leftist elected Sandinista government in 2018. And before Piñeta and Mora were awarded on stage, they were taken to a personal meeting with vice-president Mike Pence – the face of the government that is seeking to extradite Assange. I should tell you that I interviewed Mora in July 2018 after the coup, and he told me that he favored a Panama-style solution in which the US government, the US military, would invade Nicaragua and take out its leadership. So these are the people that are being honored by press freedom organizations that are ignoring Assange. There could be no better illustration of the betrayal of solidarity and the imperialization of the NGO sector than this repellent display that I just described.

When we look at the lay of the civil society landscape in the West, we see a bleak field of co-opted outfits. But we also see, and I see right now, a mass of people, especially young people, who are increasingly skeptical of the official story, who are disenchanted with the status quo, disgusted with the corporate media, and who are mobilizing to establish new networks of organic solidarity and alternative publishing platforms like the Black Agenda Report, Consortiumnews, MintPress and the Grayzone, which seek to embody the spirit of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. And we also must look at the Courage Foundation as a perfect example of this new organic network of solidarity. This movement is cohering behind Bernie Sanders and his presidential campaign, and this movement must apply pressure on Sanders, as it did on the issue of Palestine, to guarantee his opposition to Julian's extradition. That is a mission for everyone in this room. And it's a mission for everyone in this room to call out Pete Buttigieg, who said that he was uncomfortable about Obama giving clemency to Chelsea Manning. That is unacceptable and undemocratic.

And while we fight for Julian and against his opposition, we must not forget about Joshua (Jeremy) Hammond, [Oh Jeremy? I'll get to why I messed up that name], who gave us the Stratfor leaks and whose prison sentence has been unjustly extended. And Joshua Schulte, the CIA whistleblower who gave us the Vault 7 leaks, which provide the basis for Julian's indictment.

I want to leave you. I'm being told to stop. I want to leave you with a quote by an OPCW official who is not one of the whistleblowers. We received an email – Aaron Maté at the Grayzone received an email from this official that was leaked to us – and this official explained why they could not speak out about the lie and deception that took place in Douma.

“I fear those behind the crimes that have been perpetrated in the name of humanity and democracy”, the official confided, “they will not hesitate to do harm to me and my family. They have done worse many times, even in the UK.” Even in the UK (referring to a prior record). “I don't want to expose myself and my family to their violence and revenge. I don't want to live in fear of crossing the street.”

This was a fear that Julian Assange did not share. And it's why he's in Belmarsh and why the US is seeking to extradite him. That's why. So don't be afraid. We must not be afraid, we can't share that fear, we have to speak out. Thank you.

The End