



## **Topics not covered during the Coronavirus Crisis | Taylor Hudak & Zain Raza**

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**Zain Raza:** Welcome to acTVism Munich. I'm your host Zain Raza and today we'll be talking about topics that have gone under the radar due to the coronavirus with our new editorial member and journalist Taylor Hudak. Taylor, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Taylor Hudak:** Absolutely. Thank you for having me on.

**Zain Raza:** Let us begin with press freedom, in particular the case of Julian Assange. Could you update our European viewers on the recent developments on this case?

**Taylor Hudak:** Yeah, absolutely. So just last Wednesday, on March 25th, there was a bail hearing that took place at Westminster Magistrates Court and Julian Assange's attorneys wanted to get him on bail because of course the coronavirus is spreading rapidly and those who are in prison systems are at an increased risk of contracting the virus. Unfortunately, Judge Vanessa Baraitser did deny this request. Now, of course, this did not come without quite a bit of controversy. So just to kind of go through her reasoning for denying this bail request as she claimed that this global pandemic was not sufficient to grant him bail. She also said that it is the government's responsibility to protect prisoners and that she has no reason to doubt that public health England will ensure that the government does protect prisoners.

**Taylor Hudak:** She also went on to argue that Assange is a flight risk and has a history of absconding. And I will touch more on that and why that is really a mischaracterization. And his (Julian Assange) attorneys also even offered for him to be put on some sort of house arrest in that, too, was denied. Now, the defense did argue that his poor health puts him at a greater risk for contracting the virus. However, he is not technically in a risk group, but that could change day to day. Who knows if he will be in that risk group eventually. But at the time of the hearing, he was not.

**Taylor Hudak:** And just to kind of outline some of his health conditions that were cited in court, this was evidence presented by the defense. Assange has a history of respiratory tract infections and he has premature osteoporosis. He's been isolated for almost eight years and

this current lockdown is only going to increase his depression that he has. Another argument in addition to his health that was made in court is that violent terrorists have been granted bail and the courts have seemed to be able to have measures for them to ensure that they do not reoffend while they are out on bail.

Now, to kind of go through the U.S. government's claims and the U.S. government was represented by Clair Dobbin, and she argued that the Bail Act of 1917 or 1976, I'm sorry, leaves it up to the Ministry of Justice and not the courts or any judge to preemptively grant someone bail. And again, she goes back to this other point that Assange has a history of absconding. However, that is really a misrepresentation. It's a false claim. And that is because at that time back in 2012, he was seeking asylum in Ecuador's London embassy. And the reason why he was doing that was because he was fearful that being extradited to Sweden would absolutely lead him to be extradited to the United States, because Sweden has a history of being very willing to extradite people from Sweden to the U.S.. So he was very fearful of that. And then his attorney actually rebutted this argument and said, well, right now, those conditions are not the same. He does not have this fear of going to Sweden. Therefore, he said it was not really relevant to bring up this past incident. And also the U.S. claimed that his health is irrelevant to his bail.

Now, some problems that arise from Assange being in prison while this pandemic is ongoing is mainly it harms and hinders his ability to prepare his legal defense. He already had difficulties speaking with his attorneys and working on his case. This makes it even more difficult because they cannot meet with him. And then also, in addition to that, the prison conditions, like I mentioned earlier, just create an environment for this virus to be spread much more rapidly. And of course, the prisons are not equipped to really handle this situation. And these inmates are in very close quarters with one another. So that has been the main concerns from this bail. But we do know that Assange's attorney, Edward Fitzgerald, says that he is likely to appeal this decision.

**Zain Raza:** It's kinda contradictory. If you look at that the prime minister (Boris Johnson) himself has been infected with the coronavirus and the British governments somehow can assure the safety of prisoners. If you look at other countries like Iran, for example, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has pardoned ten thousand prisoners, including political prisoners, due to the fact that it could be a threat to the entire system. However the British government has been very adamant for doing (the same) for Julian Assange. But let me switch to some positive news. Chelsea Manning, the whistleblower who provided the leaks, the data, to WikiLeaks back in 2010, was ordered to be released by a federal judge. How did this all transpire? And what is the latest on Chelsea?

**Taylor Hudak:** Yes, you're correct. And this has been some really uplifting news. And I think it came as a surprise to many supporters. So Judge Anthony Trenga a few weeks back, ordered for the release of Chelsea Manning from prison.

Now, this also came at a similar time that the grand jury investigation into WikiLeaks was dropped. And this happened pretty much immediately after the first part of the extradition hearing concluded. However, Chelsea Manning was up to two hundred and fifty six thousand dollars in fines. Her supporters were able to create a "Gofundme" and she was able to surpass that amount of money. So she was able to pay off those fines and then also use that money to kind of get her life back on track. And so she could get back to her speaking at public events and just get back to a normal life because she has spent the majority of her adult life in prison. So some good news with that.

**Zain Raza:** While we're talking about whistleblowers and investigative journalism and war crimes, one of the issues that I found that did not make it to the German media for example, was a video released, a horrendous video, let me put it that way, that is from 2012, released on the 16th of March, which showed the execution of an unarmed Afghan civilian by Australian Special Air Service soldier. "Four Corners" released this video - it is an investigative Australian program - and it shows how the soldier shoots an unarmed Afghan civilian three times in the head and chest. And they also interviewed his father and he said that I had to bury my son later. The victim's name is Mohammed and he had two daughters.

To put this into context, it goes to show how our allies and our government, the German government and the U.S. Government are complicit in war crimes. And I think this will continue to go be the case unless we put the real criminals behind justice. So what is your take on how important the case of Assange is to the overall picture?

**Taylor Hudak:** Well, it's extremely important and this has been discussed many times with the Assange case and that entire situation is the fact that this has repercussions for not only journalists, but also citizens and people all over the world because it impedes on the public's right to know. And journalism will be fundamentally different if Assange is extradited, tried and convicted in the United States. So it's extremely important that this does not happen. And I think that we need to ensure that he is not extradited to the US because the chances of him receiving a fair trial in the Eastern District Court of Virginia is quite low to the point where that specific court, I believe, has a 100 percent conviction rate and it's known as the espionage court. And he would not receive a fair trial by any means.

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### COMMERCIAL BREAK:

**Zain Raza:** Taylor let us take a pause here so we can take a small break, guys. Check out this commercial.

**Glenn Greenwald:** This is an act of pure journalism. Every journalist in the world should have been cheering for Edward Snowden. He did what every journalist is supposed to be devoted to.

**Edward Snowden:** Because we have evidence that when we do that, things go wrong.

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**Zain Raza:** Welcome back. We're having a discussion about topics that have gone under the radar due to the coronavirus and now we're going to switch to another topic. Taylor, let's talk about Tulsi Gabbard. There is not much coverage on Tulsi Gabbard. It is similar to the case of Jill Stein. She was not much covered here in Germany during 2016 and we noticed the same thing happening with Tulsi Gabbard. She recently endorsed presidential candidate Joe Biden. Could you talk about who Tulsi Gabbard is and then talk about the significance of this endorsement?

**Taylor Hudak:** Yes. So Tulsi Gabbard is an establishment Democratic candidate. She is no longer running for office. She did drop out of the race and did endorse Joe Biden. But for some history on Tulsi Gabbard. She was really a challenge to the Democratic establishment. She was the anti-war candidate. She had a very progressive foreign policy, I would say, compared to her opponents, where she was really calling for the end of regime change wars and to just end these endless wars throughout the world. And people really, really admired her for that. And she had a history of really challenging authorities back in 2016 when she was VP (Vice President) of the DNC (Democratic National Committee). She actually stepped down to support Bernie Sanders. And that was really a brave move on her part because she was a rising star of the Democratic Party. So she was really uplifted as this person who was a progressive hero almost, who really was going to implement some policies that people who are in favor of and really change U.S. foreign policy.

Now for some additional information on her. Quickly, she also raised awareness during her campaign about the potential threat of a nuclear war between China, Russia and the United States around this time as well believe. Hillary Clinton, a former presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton referred to Gabbard as a "Russian asset". This (Tulsi Gabbard) is a U.S. soldier. OK. So she referred to her as a "Russian asset" and Tulsi Gabbard went back at her and said, "you are the queen of warmongers". So she (Tulsi Gabbard) was somebody just to put into perspective here, she was someone who seemed fearless, really.

Now, her supporting Joe Biden then comes as a huge surprise. OK. Because Joe Biden shares very little in common with Tulsi Gabbard. She shares much more in common with Bernie Sanders. And she did not throw her support behind Bernie Sanders and they were also at one time pretty good friends, I believe. And in fairness, she did say that she would support the Democratic nominee, whomever that was. We still do not have a nominee yet, but many are believing that it's going to be Joe Biden but still, time will tell.

And another interesting point here is that CIA veterans also endorse Joe Biden. More than 80 former spies, CIA veterans and other members of the intelligence community actually drafted a statement in support of Joe Biden. And in the statement, they really condemn President Trump. And they also call upon the need to restore the United States reputation throughout

the world and that we get the respect back that we once had and that the U.S. has lost its prestige. And they believe Joe Biden is the candidate to do that. And the reason why they probably support Biden is because he is far more likely to continue U.S. foreign policy of intervention and regime change wars. He has a history of really voting for certain policies that continue with U.S. imperialism. So the reason why that's significant here is because Gabbard ran on changing the foreign policy in the United States and she is supporting a candidate that these very same people who really initiated these wars and the continuation of U.S. imperialism, she is supporting the same candidate as these individuals. So it's just something interesting to think about. And many people were disappointed with her decision. But like I said earlier, in fairness, she did say she would support the nominee, whoever it was.

**Zain Raza:** Let us move to another topic. This is related to the coronavirus, and I think it deserves some mention in this discussion. Instead of seeing U.S. Army medics or soldiers, which are usually deployed in hundreds of bases worldwide and are the first ones to go to war, whether it's in Afghanistan or Iraq, instead of seeing these people come to the aid of European nations, we are seeing countries such as, usually considered as as the enemy, Cuba and China arriving to Italy in the region of Lombardy where the coronavirus breakout happened and assisting there. They're also going worldwide in assisting wherever they can. So could you comment about this development?

**Taylor Hudak:** Yeah, it's very interesting and ironic in a sense that the countries that the United States has really demonized are really stepping up and helping Italy, a country that has been really impacted by this global pandemic. Specifically, Italy called for help from Cuba, China and Venezuela. And they have been able to receive that help. And Cuba in particular, sent aid to Italy and also England. And the Havana embassy, in fact, declared a solidarity with Italy, which is really a symbolic gesture to show that they are there to help. China also immediately responded to these requests for help. Unfortunately, the EU did not help. Haven't they haven't really been doing much. The European Commission, which leads the EU, in fact, called upon member states to cut spending, medical spending and also privatize the health care system. This is between a period of 2011 and 2018. So they've done very, very little to help.

Now, in addition to all of this, not only is the US not providing aid, but also continuing with sanctions in Venezuela and Iran, which is extremely problematic because there were already issues with the civilians who were impacted by these sanctions, which is only going to get worse as we're in this global pandemic. So just to provide everybody with some context here before this crisis hit, according to the Center for Economic Policy and Research, forty thousand people have died as a result of U.S. sanctions in Venezuela between 2017 & 2018. They are struggling to find medicine and medical supplies right now because of U.S. sanctions. We can only imagine that that number is going to increase because of this virus. And another note here is that some have been calling this a potential genocide. And if you look at Article 2 of the Geneva Convention of 1948, the US has signed on to this by the way, and that states that if a country has a policy in which the intended outcome is to destroy a

population or harm a particular group of people, that is in fact considered a genocide. So the United States has even put more stricter sanctions on these countries. Iran and Venezuela in particular, which is extremely problematic at this time. And like you were saying Zain, it is these other countries that the U has demonized who have really stood up and been leaders in this world.

**Zain Raza:** It's kind of ironic that privatization that the EU, they did in Greece as well, have been trying to implement since 2011 to 2018 through these neoliberal policies are now being rescued by socialist policies from Cuba, a country that has been in embargo for the longest time. And things were getting a bit easier under Obama. But I think under Trump, they have stepped up (become worse).

Just to provide a little more context: Cuba provided assistance doing the Ebola outbreak in Western Africa in 2014. Even in my own country in Pakistan, Cuban teams were sent when this huge earthquake happened in 2005. They were also there to provide support in South Asian countries in 2004, providing help to the countries that were affected by the tsunami. And I just read this up today that Cuba has one of the lowest child mortality rates on par with Germany and has one of the highest doctors per capita. So it's kind of an ironic situation.

But we're running out of time. So let me get to the last topic. Politicians in the U.S. government. And this is an underreported fact in Germany, they have misused their power and I read somewhere that they used this crisis to profit through the stock market. Could you elaborate on this?

**Taylor Hudak:** Yes. So you're exactly right. We have learned that at least five U.S. senators sold millions of dollars worth of stock after acquiring privilege knowledge about this virus. This was back in February of this year. This was when there were only, I believe, fifteen confirmed cases in the US. So it wasn't public knowledge at that time that this virus was really going to harm the economy and really impact the stock market. So at least five of them, these five U.S. senators had this information and they acted upon that information and sold stock, which is really problematic because this is completely illegal. And they know this. And people are calling for their resignation. Well, we'll see what happens with that. But they knew at that time that this virus was very contagious and this all came to light when NPR released an audio recording of Senator Richard Burr, where he said how this virus can be transmitted very quickly and spread very quickly. So very illegal what they've done. But of course, we can expect politicians to abuse their power, but many are calling for the resignation, which would be the appropriate thing to do.

**Zain Raza:** Taylor, thanks for your time and looking forward to doing the next episode with you.

**Taylor Hudak:** Absolutely. Thank you.

**Zain Raza:** And thank you guys for tuning in today. Don't forget to subscribe to our YouTube channel by clicking on the bell below and to donate so we can continue to produce independent and nonprofit news and analysis. I'm your host Zain Raza See you guys next time.

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