



The Semi-Inside Story of Why Trump Refused to Pardon Snowden and Assange

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Hey everyone, it's Glenn Greenwald, and I'm back with a new episode of System Update here on our home on Rumble, and I want to give as much as I can of an inside look into why it is that former President Trump did not pardon either Edward Snowden or Julian Assange, as many expected that he would prior to leaving the White House. This is a topic that has been much discussed over the past year. The discussion intensified as he was in the transition, getting ready to leave the White House, and it's been rejuvenated as a result of a recent interview he did with Candace Owens, where she asked him quite assertively and pressed him on why it is that he didn't pardon either of them. And his answer in which he indicated that he was very close to pardoning one, but not necessarily the other, re-rose these questions about why it is that Trump didn't issue these pardons and what really happened. And as someone who was involved both publicly, obviously, but also behind the scenes in trying to secure pardons for one or both of them I do want to shed as much light as I can based on my knowledge of what it is that happened here. Now just to remind you of this series of events. Prior to becoming president well before he even ran in 2016, Trump was very harsh in his assessment of whistleblowers like Edward Snowden and Julian Assange. He had, I remember very clearly during the Snowden reporting, said he thought Snowden was a traitor who deserved to be executed. He had said similar things about Julian Assange at a time when Joe Biden and Barack Obama and Obama officials all were saying the same thing. And once he got into office, he obviously became an antagonist of the very agencies that both Julian Assange and Edward Snowden devoted themselves to exposing- the CIA, the NSA, the FBI. And so Trump clearly had a change of heart. He often praised Julian Assange during the 2016 campaign as a hero when Assange was doing the reporting that Hillary Clinton believes was, along with Jim Comey, the primary reason she lost. And then in 2020, in an event that surprised a lot of people in August of 2020, in a press conference when asked, Trump said he was quote, looking very strongly at the possibility of granting a pardon to Edward Snowden. This took everybody by a lot of surprise. But people

who are close to Trump, who are more civil libertarians in the Republican Party, such as Congressman Matt Gaetz of Florida and Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, had been lobbying Trump, trying to persuade him to issue a pardon of Snowden. Others were doing the same with Assange, and that's what led to this question. And you'll hear Trump here say that while he wasn't sure, he was looking very closely at doing.

Reporter in Video: Do you want to give Edward Snowden a pardon and bring him back? You once suggested...

Trump in Video: Well, I'm going to look at it. I mean, I'm not that aware of the Snowden situation, but I'm going to start looking at it. There are many, many people, it seems to be a split decision, and many people think that he should be somehow treated differently and other people think he did very bad things. And I'm going to take a very good look at it. OK. I mean, I've seen people that are very conservative and very liberal, and they agree on the same issue. They agree both ways. I'm going to take a look at that very strongly, Edward Snowden.

GG: Now as the question suggested he had actually made reference on his own to the possibility that he would pardon Snowden several months earlier, which is what led to that question and the lobbying. Now, as soon as Trump said that in that press conference and it generated headlines that he was very strongly considering a pardon of Snowden, it created a lot of reaction in the political class. People who are more anti-establishment in both parties, who are more populist, who view the security state as an obnoxious and nefarious force in American political life instantly manifested in favour of a pardon. While the Pro-CIA, Pro-Militarism, Pro-deep state establishment politicians in both parties instantly proclaimed it heinous that Trump was even considering it. You can see the breakdown. Here, for example, is Senator Rand Paul in a tweet from August 15th, where he says in response to a headline that a lot of people think Edward Snowden should not be treated like a criminal. Senator Paul said I'm one of them. Snowden revealed that Trump haters, Clapper and Comey, amongst others, were illegally spying on Americans. Clapper lied to Congress about it. Donald Trump should pardon Edward Snowden. Here from November, a couple of months after it was Tulsi Gabbard, the Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii, urging Trump publicly to pardon Edward Snowden and Julian Assange. And the subheadline, you can see that Congressman Thomas Massie, who is a populist, a anti-establishment Republican from Kentucky, also according to this article, asked Trump to pardon both Snowden and Assange. And then here is Congressman Matt Gaetz in September, and he repeatedly said this: Pardon Snowden. Put it very simply and to the point. So you had these people who are more aligned with President Trump in both the Republican and Democratic parties aligned with the anti-establishment politics of that era, urging that one or both be pardoned. And then you have the worst people in American political life from both parties, who are servants to the deep state who use the abuses of the deep state for their own ends, expressing horror. Here, for example, was Susan Rice, who was President Obama's ambassador to the UN and also his national security adviser who invoked the language of an eight year old or an eighth grader at best on

MySpace, circa 1998. And in response to the headlines that Trump was considering a pardon of Snowden, tweeted: I just can't. Congratulations, GOP. This is who you are now. That was echoed by Congresswoman Liz Cheney, who tweeted, quote, Edward Snowden is a traitor. He is responsible for the largest and most dangerous release of classified info in US history. He handed over US secrets to Russia and Chinese intelligence, putting our troops and our nation at risk. Pardoning him would be unconscionable. Now I probably don't even need to point out that Liz Cheney is a pathological liar. Her claim that Edward Snowden handed over US secrets to Chinese and Russian intelligence is a complete and utter lie that she fabricated. I did an entire video actually on that once, when Joe Scarborough made the same claim recently on NBC News, dissecting and proving that that's a lie. But that is who Liz Cheney is. And then she again tweeted in December during the transition when it was being discussed again, quote, Edward Snowden is a traitor. And she said something very similar. Now, the argument for why President Trump not only should have pardoned Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, but why some of us believed there was a chance that he could, didn't rely on the benevolence of President Trump. It relied on the fact that he knew better than anybody how deceitful and abusive and dangerous these agencies are. The agencies that were exposed by Snowden and Assange and the ones that were demanding that they be imprisoned forever. He knew, as well as anybody, the treachery and the illegal interference in our domestic politics because he was one of their targets. And that was why some of us thought that it was a genuine possibility. And one of the people in the media who most advocated for and covered the reasons to pardon both Assange and Snowden was Fox News's Tucker Carlson, he went on a virtual crusade. He hosted Assange's fiancée, Stella Moris, his father and his brother, as well as celebrities advocating for Assange such as Roger Waters and Pamela Anderson, knowing that Donald Trump often watches the Tucker Carlson Show, and this was an opportunity for all of them to speak directly to Trump and advocate for that pardon. I went on several times to do the same thing, and here in September of 2020 was my summary of the arguments to President Trump about why he should pardon Snowden and Assange. This was the case we were all making, not just publicly on Fox News, but also behind the scenes to the people who had Trump's ears. Here's the argument we were making.

Tucker Carlson: So, Glenn, thanks for coming on. I think a lot of people have heard for years that Julian Assange is a bad guy who hurt the United States. Now the United States is going to bring justice in this case. What's your view of this? Tell us what we should know in three minutes about Julian Assange.

GG in Fox News: Let's remember, Tucker, that the criminal investigation into Julian Assange began by the Obama administration because in 2010 WikiLeaks published a slew of documents, none of which harmed anybody, not even the government claims that. That was very embarrassing to the Obama administration that revealed all kinds of abuses and lies that they were telling about these endless wars that the Pentagon and the CIA are determined to fight. They were embarrassing to Hillary Clinton. And so they initiated a grand jury investigation to try and prosecute him for reporting to the public. He worked with The New

York Times, The Guardian to publish very embarrassing information about the endless war machine, about the neocons who were working in the Obama administration. To understand what's happening here we can look at a very similar case, which is one that President Trump recently raised, which is the prosecution by the Obama administration, as well, of Edward Snowden for the same reason. That he exposed the lies that James Clapper told, he exposed how there's this massive spying system that the NSA and the CIA control that they can use against American citizens. And obviously, this isn't coming from President Trump. He praised WikiLeaks in 2016 for informing the public. He knows firsthand how these spying systems that Edward Snowden exposed can be abused and were abused in 2016. This is coming from people who work in the CIA, who work in the Pentagon, who insist on endless war and who believe that they're a government unto themselves more powerful than the president. I posted this weekend a speech from Dwight Eisenhower warning that this Military-Industrial Complex, what we now call the deep state, is becoming more powerful than the President. Chuck Schumer warned right before President Trump took office that President Trump challenging the CIA was foolish because they have many ways to get back at anybody who impedes them. That's what these cases are about, Tucker. They're punishing Julian Assange and trying to punish Edward Snowden for informing the public about things they have the right to know about the Obama administration. They're basically saying to President Trump, You don't run the country even though you were elected. We do. And they're daring him to use his pardon power to put an end to these very abusive prosecutions.

GG: So that was the argument that we were making. And I think to this very day, it's true. The CIA and the NSA and the Pentagon believe that they run Washington, and they made it very clear that they absolutely vehemently were opposed to a pardon of either Julian Assange or Edward Snowden. Destroying each of them is a top priority of those agencies because of their anger to this very day that their crimes and lies were exposed by both of their brave acts. And it was up to President Trump to essentially make a strong statement that it's not those deep state operatives who run our government, but it's the elected president, and that was what a pardon could have done. Now I know for a fact that heading into the transition, once Joe Biden was formally and officially declared the winner of the 2020 presidential election, even though President Trump hadn't yet accepted it, he was obviously aware of the significant possibility, though he believed the election result was fraudulent, that he would leave the White House. And he was looking at those weeks as part of his transition and was actively and strongly considering pardoning both of them. Snowden more than Assange, as we'll get to, but it was absolutely a very distinct possibility. I was speaking to the people as close to Trump as you get, all of whom were telling me exactly the same thing. I was speaking to other people who speak directly to Trump all the time, who were very confident that they could get at least one of those done, if not both, that they had persuaded him that it was the just thing to do. Reporters in Washington knew that and started reporting it. So here, for example, is a Politico article from December 24th, 2020 headlines: Snowden allies see opening amid Trump clemency blitz. Knowing that Trump was starting to issue a lot of pardons, he had pardoned a lot of his associates, like Paul Manafort and Roger Stone. And it

was definitely a very serious option being considered by Trump himself as late as mid-December. The Politico article explains: Senator Rand Paul has talked to Trump about a Snowden pardon, as has Representative Matt Gaetz, both lawmakers who have had Trump's ear. The just pardoned Roger Stone, a longtime Trump adviser, also made a public appeal for Snowden's clemency. Their pitch: Snowden has been unfairly persecuted after revealing the mendacity of people like James Clapper, the former director of national intelligence. It's an argument that may play well with Trump, who also sees himself as a victim of the American intelligence services and despises Clapper. Quote: He revealed that James Clapper, the highest ranking most powerful spy in the world, was spying on Americans and lied to us about it, Paul said in an interview. So I would think Snowden did what he did was a service to the American people and he ought to be pardoned. But while the libertarian wing of the GOP is pushing for a Snowden pardon- alongside a few scattered Democrats and high profile human rights groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union- ACLU- more traditional Republicans, meaning the Republican establishment, are opposed. To them Snowden is a traitor- full stop. He broke the law by leaking classified information and did irreparable damage to the country's spying capability. I showed you earlier that that's what Liz Cheney, a leading opponent of a pardon, was saying. That's what Susan Rice was saying, and it was also what people like Marco Rubio were saying, quote, I think he's a traitor worthy of federal prison. So you had the Republican establishment that never liked Trump, that never supported Trump. And demanding that he not pardon Assange or Snowden, it was an incredibly high priority to them. The problem is he wasn't listening to people like Marco Rubio or warmongers or Liz Cheney. He was listening to people like Rand Paul and Matt Gaetz, those were the people who were most supporting him. Now what I heard at the time was that the only meaningful impediment to a pardon, the only person who had Trump's ear that was really being effective in arguing against it was Mike Pompeo, who was the director of the CIA and the person most responsible for the prosecution of Assange under the Trump presidency and then became the secretary of state. As I've often said, Pompeo was a neocon, is a neocon, who manipulated and deceived Trump by flattering him and staying in his good graces. So Pompeo was the one who was the one we knew we had to overcome in the transition. But there were enough people pushing Trump such, that we started to hear and believe based on very good, reliable information, that it was more than a 50 percent chance likely that Trump was going to pardon Snowden and less than 50 percent, but very far from zero, that he would pardon Assange. Now, as we know, Trump left the White House and he pardoned neither of them. And I was angry about that because I knew it was a real possibility. And here's the tweet I posted on January 20th, the day Trump left the White House and Joe Biden moved in. I tweeted, quote: Trump left the White House about as weak, cucked, and submissive as it's possible for a grown adult to scamper away. Now you can obviously see the anger and disgust in that tweet, because I knew that Trump wanted to pardon Edward Snowden. And had strongly considered pardoning Julian Assange, but got scared into pardoning neither of them for reasons I'm about to explain to you. Now, remember what happened after that Politico article on December 24th, after all of these indications were coming that Donald Trump was considering pardoning both Snowden and Assange, he was

considering declassifying the JFK files, he was considering a whole variety of other acts that the establishment in Washington, meaning the establishment wings of all parties were petrified he was going to do. What happened, they brought a second impeachment trial against him after January 6th. They brought an impeachment proceeding against the president, who they knew they had no time to impeach and remove from office. Why would they do that? It never made any sense from that perspective. Why would you try and impeach somebody who is obviously going to be leaving the White House before you have a chance to impeach them? The reason is, it is because that gave them enormous leverage Republicans in particular over Trump being able to say to him, We know you want to do things like pardoning Edward Snowden and are considering Julian Assange and are considering declassifying CIA documents from 60 years ago about the JFK assassination and other matters that we don't want you to do. And now we have leverage over you. If you do something like pardoning Julian Assange or Edward Snowden, we will vote to convict you in that impeachment trial that will render you potentially barred from seeking office in the future. You will have been the first president or the second president or the first president in over a century to be impeached and then convicted. It was a serious threat that Trump wanted to avoid. And the Republicans like Marco Rubio and Lindsey Graham, who were working with Liz Cheney to prevent these pardons, suddenly had a lot of leverage over Trump. Here, for example, is Trump now on this kind of apology tour on December 22nd, so about two weeks ago. He said that he was, quote, close to pardoning Julian Assange or Edward Snowden. Saying, I know a lot of you are mad at me that he didn't pardon either Edward Snowden nor Julian Assange. I submitted to the deep state I got cucked by the CIA and the NSA. But the reason that I did was because it was my own decision. I was so close to doing it. I was about to do it, and just at the last second, I decided I wasn't going to. Now, to her credit, Candace Owens sat down with President Trump, former President Trump, about a week ago on December 29 and pressed him on this topic. I think it's the first time anyone has. And listen to what President Trump told her.

Candace Owen (CO) in Video: And I want to ask you in terms of talking about this corruption, by the way, a name that comes to mind in the news recently is Julian Assange. You know, he was exposing this corruption early on. He's had his life ruined because of it. It's a really sad story. Edward Snowden, I mean, think about that bravery. For me, I was quite young when that was going on. But I mean, the idea of saying, Hey, whistleblowing, actually, we've got some corruption going on. They're not being honest with the American people. You could have had a chance to pardon these individuals. What was what? Why, why decide not to at that moment?

Trump in Video: You have two sides of it, in one case, you have sort of a spy deal going on, and in another case you have somebody that's exposing real corruption. I feel a little bit, I won't say which one, but I feel a little bit more strongly about one than the other. But, and you probably understand that, but I could have done it. But I will say, you have people on both sides of that issue, good people on both sides and you have some bad people on one

side. But I decided to let that one ride, let the courts work it out. And I guess the courts are actually doing that.

CO in Video: Yeah, these are big decisions.

Trump in Video: Yeah, in a certain way, you know, you have a country and there was some spying things and there was some bad things released that really set us back and really hurt us with what they did. You understand that. But at the same time, in many cases, what they did, these are the same people that came after me so viciously and dishonestly.

CO in Video: That's why I thought, Hey, if I am in your circumstance, You know what?!...

Trump in Video: I could have gone, I was very close to going the other way.

CO in Video: I think you were too nice.

Trump in Video: I might have been too nice. I've been known for being very nice.

GG: I was so close to doing it, he said. And she said, I think you were too nice. You didn't confront the people who just got done saying, spent four years viciously trying to destroy your presidency. Why didn't you? Why didn't you confront them this way? Why didn't you defy them? Why didn't you protect the people who were courageous enough to stand up to them and are now paying for it with their lives? Edward Snowden, who's in a country he never chose to be in? He got trapped in that country for eight years now with his American wife and American son, who can't come home because they will immediately arrest him. I did a video where I proved that he never chose to go to Russia as Susan Rice and Liz Cheney, and so many others have lied for years, claiming that he did. Ben Rhodes wrote a book, the Obama aide, in which he boasted of the fact that Snowden was trying to get out of Russia, go through to Cuba on his way to Latin America to seek asylum. And Ben Rhodes successfully bullied the Cubans into withdrawing their guarantee of safe passage of Snowden, which is what trapped Snowden in Russia. Assange is now in prison, tomorrow, and taping this on Tuesday, will be his 1000 day in Belmarsh Prison, the high security prison in the UK, with no end in sight to get out. And he spent seven years protected in the Ecuadorian Embassy prior to that because of persecution by the United States. Why didn't Trump protect them after they so courageously stood up to these agencies that Trump personally knows are so pernicious?! Here's Matt Gaetz confirming what I said earlier. He said I lobbied Trump extensively on this. He felt better about Snowden and Assange. I regret we didn't make it happen. So he's saying, as Trump said, I felt better about one than the other. He was closer to pardoning Snowden than Assange. I regret that we didn't make it happen. Again, it's not hard to know why this didn't happen. Here is CNN in December of 2020 saying as Trump lays pardon GOP divided on whether Snowden should receive one. There were Republican senators aggressively demanding that Trump drop the intention to pardon Snowden and Assange. One

of them, just as an example was Lindsey Graham, who in December of 2020 said during the transition tweeted: To those urging a pardon of Edward Snowden: You are suggesting President Trump pardon a traitor. Edward Snowden is NOT a victim. Snowden has American blood on his hands and should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Now that too, was a lie, as I documented in that same video, not one document that we published with Edward Snowden ever jeopardised a single individual. The same is true of Assange, but Lindsey Graham doesn't care. He'll just say that anyway. But this is what was going on inside the Republican caucus. In December though they really had no leverage, which is why he was getting closer and closer to pardoning Edward Snowden. And that's when, as you see here from U.S. News on January 12th, six days after the Jan. 6th riot, the headline: On the Eve of Impeachment Vote, Some Republicans Jump Ship as Trump Sinks. Three Republicans so far have announced their support for impeaching President Donald Trump as the party considers a post-Trump era. They were making very clear to him, explicitly clear, Republican senators like Lindsey Graham and Marco Rubio and Mitch McConnell, that if you do any of those things that you are considering doing, pardoning Assange and Snowden, declassifying JFK files, declassifying other secrets that should have been declassified long ago because they're from decades old treachery on the part of the US government we will vote to impeach you. They had this leverage the sword of Damocles hanging over his head. And I am not saying this to justify Trump's cowardly refusal to do what he should have done in pardoning Edward Snowden, then Julian Assange. Candace Owen was right in that video that he should have and that if she were in his position, she would have. I'm explaining what I know happened, which is that all signs are pointing in the direction of him pardoning Snowden, for sure. And maybe Assange. And then suddenly this preposterous impeachment proceeding to impeach a president who was on his way out anyway emerged precisely because it gave them the leverage to threaten Trump and say that they would convict him if he did any of those things. And that is why he left office without doing what you can tell from that video he knows he should have done. He's very sheepish, very uncharacteristically timid about explaining why he did not. Oh, I was just too nice. I was just too nice. I'm known for being too nice. That wasn't the reason. The reason was because he was afraid of those Republican threats to convict him. As a result Julian Assange languishes in prison. His mental and physical health more in danger than ever, and Edward Snowden is going to be in Russia indefinitely. Can't leave the borders of that country without being immediately arrested for at least the next three years. There's no chance Biden will pardon Edward Snowden. Maybe Donald Trump will have another chance in 2024 to do what he should have done the first time. Maybe some other president will do so, but this is the story of why the deep state yet again got its way. Even with a person in the White House who knows firsthand just how evil and destructive and toxic they are.

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