



**Assange# "could be headed to the US in weeks" — WikiLeaks
Editor-in-Chief Speaks to Glenn Greenwald**

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): I'm really delighted to welcome for our interview segment the editor in chief of WikiLeaks, Kristinn Hrafnsson, who is here with us in the studio, not even by video. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today.

Kristinn Hrafnsson (KH): Thanks for having me.

GG: Yeah, it's great to see you. So obviously, Julian, being such a charismatic figure, is known to most people for his founding of and role in building WikiLeaks. And what I often remind people is that WikiLeaks is not just Julian. There's a large team that has always been working alongside him, and you're one of those key people. So if we can begin by talking a little bit about the role that you've played in working with WikiLeaks and your responsibility for its growth, I think that would be helpful.

KH: Well, I was working in the mainstream media as a journalist then and have been for 20 years when I first met Julian in 2009. I'm an Icelandic journalist and WikiLeaks came to the attention of the Icelandic nation actually in 2009 when they got hold of internal documents for the failed Icelandic banks that went under in 2008. And my country went through an economic meltdown, basically. And this leak, the internal bank leak from WikiLeaks in 2009 was the biggest financial story. And explained why this all happened. And he became a celebrity who was invited to Iceland and people wanted to know more about him and his philosophy. So I sought him out and we befriended and we spent a lot of time together. And this winter, 2009 and 10, and I was still working as a broadcast journalist, and one day in a cafe where the rain was pouring down the windows in my dreadful city, he said, I got to show you something. And he flipped open a computer and showed me the Collateral Murder video. The rest is history.

GG: Which for those who don't remember was the video showing US pilots gunning down, I think, 12 or 13 people, including two journalists, one of whom worked for Reuters. And that was the first video that really brought WikiLeaks onto the map. Talk about the role that you played in some of the reporting that was done, because I think a lot of people don't understand how much reporting, actual just standard journalism, goes into WikiLeaks releases.

KH: Well, this release was the first of the bombshell releases of 2010 that contingent into 2011 and are the basis of the indictment against Julian Assange. It came out on April 5th, 2010. I worked for weeks in analysing the video, going through all the details of the story and trying to figure out what had happened; what we were actually watching on the horrible images on the screen. And in the end, before the video was released, I travelled with a camera crew to Baghdad to actually seek out the people who were affected, who lost their relatives and the two children who were injured in the attack, the children who lost their father. In the part of the video, which is obvious to everybody, it is an absolute war crime. So that was the journalism part and we released all that alongside the video and that sort of set the tone. Then in the middle of the summer, it was the field reports from the Afghan war, from the military, and that, of course, at that point there was a much bigger media alliance, we got on board The Guardian and The New York Times. And there was Spiegel. And the alliance then sort of broadened out to broadcasting when he published the Iraq reports in October the same year. But internally there was always editorial work done on this material alongside with a journalist that we got on board in the Media Alliance. And there's a lot of talk about data dumping. There was never any data dump being done. That is the misconception that is constantly being pushed out there as propaganda, as an irresponsible data dumping. I can say as a journalist for 20 years, before meeting Julian and coming on board on this journey, that probably I was often at odds with Julian. I thought he was too careful, you know. So, I mean, there were reductions, considerations to put into place and a lot of discussions with the media partners and internally. And often the whole media partners were actually pushing in the other direction.

GG: Greater releases. Yeah, you know, I mean, I had the same experience in the Snowden reporting where, you know, people to this day think we released indiscriminately all this information when in fact there was a constant effort to decide what should and shouldn't be released in a way that I learnt from WikiLeaks. That you guys were doing in those first set of releases that made WikiLeaks so famous. But even subsequent releases including, in 2016 or 2017 when you released these major revelations about the CIA and some of the ways in which it's spying, a lot of those documents were also heavily redacted or withheld. Talk about that process as well.

KH: Well, I was not that much involved in the 2016, 2017 releases. But if you think about, for example, the Volt 7 release about exposing these spying tools of the CIA, which was a very explosive story, but it didn't get much pickup. You have to admit that it somehow went

under the radar. Maybe people were getting too used to the fact that everybody was spying on everybody. But in those document releases, I mean, there's the misconception that we exposed the tools, we made the spying tools, the code available, which is simply not correct. It was just the description of these tools and that they existed. But this is one of the very many misconceptions in what people think WikiLeaks are. And it's the annoying part, this is propaganda, this is the Pentagon lie. This is what is being pushed out constantly and it just seeps in and sort of sticks on to the WikiLeaks label; irresponsibly and non-journalistic data dumping, etc., when factually it's simply wrong. And you talk about criticism. I mean, I remember when we were releasing the Iraq War Logs and I was involved in sort of managing the media alliance through the The Guardian and the newspapers on the ground and the Al-Jazeera TV station that was involved as well, both Arabic and English, when the material came out, everybody went ballistic. Why was it too heavily redacted?!

GG: People were angry that you had withheld so much.

KH: ...withheld too much and too much reduction. There were two examples where some of the material that we released redacted, were released by other media outlets with less reduction. We were more careful.

GG: Yeah, no, it's ironic because I know I was actually sometimes questioning and even critical of my belief that too much was being withheld. And then when we did the Snowden reporting, Julian was certainly critical on the grounds that we withheld too much as well. Ironic that the perception was deliberately cultivated, albeit falsely, that in each case we were doing nothing but indiscriminately dumping, if not dumping with the intention to create harm. So as I mentioned at the start, you're here with us in the new studio and despite the fact that you're a European and therefore have mastered all sorts of words in Portuguese with way too little work, I find that annoying, but you are not actually Brazilian. You're travelling here through Brazil. Why is that? Why are you here in Brazil and South America more broadly?

KH: Well, I mean, the short answer is this: Julian's case is coming to the end of all possibilities of getting a fair solution through the court proceedings. He is fighting extradition in London. Within weeks actually, he could be extradited. We are now in a waiting period for the appeal court in London, the High Court to give us the answer whether they will hear an appeal by Julian to push back against the extradition. If they decide not to hear the appeal, which would be scandalous in itself, then there is the Supreme Court who could quickly decide not to hear the case, you know, not of importance to the public...

GG: ...the Home Secretary could within weeks or days, even.

KH: Under the worst case scenario, he could be on a plane to the US within weeks. So in my perception, and I've been sitting in on all the proceedings in London and all the extradition proceedings in London have exposed only one thing. And that's the fact that this is just not

going to be won in a court. There's no justice to be held in courtrooms in London, it is obvious. And I don't have to mention the United States; I mean, that is one of the essence of the defence of Julian in fighting extradition, that he will never be able to get a fair trial there. So we're running out of time, we need to put this on a different level. And so I decided that we needed to go on a tour and shore up political support because the only way to actually fight political persecution is through political means. So we are now travelling through Latin America to get support from political leaders, from the civil society here, organisations, artists and travelling to the core-nations here in South America and will end in Mexico and the north side. So our aim is to get political leaders to apply pressure, if you will call it that, or just to request the Biden administration to reconsider, to stand by their own ideals, the ideals that they preach around the world of press freedom and put this pressure on the First Amendment and the treaty commitments and basically drop the charges against Julian. And that's the only way out.

GG: So I want to talk just a second about the Biden administration and the Justice Department's posture towards this case. But before I do, as part of this trip, you were able to meet with the president elect of Brazil, Lula da Silva. I think people sometimes forget what an important country Brazil is, strategically, it's the sixth most populous country in the world, the second largest in the hemisphere, has enormous petroleum reserves, as well as the Amazon makes Brazil an extremely important country, always has been in the Cold War struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States. There was a coup engineered in Brazil by the CIA to overthrow a democratically elected government that ushered in the military dictatorship. And Lula has been extremely outspoken, not just now, but over the years, including when he himself was in prison on very dubious corruption charges in his defence of Julian, constantly heralding him as a hero and talking about the critical work that WikiLeaks does and insisting that any attempt to prosecute him would be a grave injustice. Why do you think it is that you have a leader in Brazil who doesn't get much political benefit by saying those sorts of things so passionately and focussed on WikiLeaks? And yet in the United States, it's almost impossible to find a leftist or even centre left political figure on a national level- not Bernie, not AOC, no one from the Squad, let alone a more mainstream Democrat- speak anywhere near as passionately or even at all in WikiLeaks defence.

KH: Well, I met Lula and I mean, he comes across as a very warm and honest person and I could sense that he feels passionate about us, as you say, and it's genuine. And the reason is, of course, that he has firsthand experience of the same kind of lawfare, persecution and imprisonment and injustice. So he can sense it in his own skin, the grave level of injustice that is being brought against Julian. So he is passionate on that front. In general in this country, as you were talking about the history here, I've not spent many days here, but what strikes me is that I don't have to convince anybody. I don't have to go to the sales pitch of telling people or explaining about what the CIA is capable of doing in political interference and planning assassination and kidnappings and what have you. Whereas in other countries, people set up a sort of suspiciousness, whether this is a conspiracy theory. You know, this

region and this nation, of course, knows firsthand what the capabilities are to use these tools. And there's a big understanding. So that I think explains the general's sympathy and understanding we have. And that reflects in Lula's position, which I admire him for, as you mentioned, there is not much for him to gain..

GG: It is not a big political winner...

KH: But he takes it very personally and in the fact that, you know, we, the delegation of WikiLeaks, we come to Brasilia in an extremely chaotic moment in the middle of the transition, where they are having all this difficulties of setting emergency law to actually expose the secrecy clauses of the Bolsonaro regime. And where we know that the Bolsonaro regime is making the transition very, very difficult.

GG: They're still concerned about whether there will be an actual acceptance of the legitimacy of the election. And yet that's why I say in the middle of all that Lula was making a point not only to meet with you, but the public manifest on behalf of Julian. You know, I think there was a lot of reporting done as part of the Snowden archive about NSA spying on Brazil, on the then president, Dilma Rousseff, who was the handpicked successor, on its oil company, Petrobras, of various agencies and on the Brazilian people generally. And there were WikiLeaks releases about things that were done by the US security state against Brazil as well. But I do think there's this interesting aspect that if you say that the CIA does bad things to the United States, not many people will rush to disagree with you. Though, they'll be willing to kind of cursorily acknowledge that it's probably true. But they don't really feel in their bones the way people who have been on the other side of the CIA's actions or the US intelligence agencies actions, the true magnitude of it. And anyone who feels that, I think will automatically be receptive to the need for this kind of transparency in a way that people in the United States who still, even though don't want to admit it, you kind of have this implicit trust in in the CIA. So let me ask you regarding the US, Julian has now been imprisoned for more than three years in London, despite the fact that he has never been charged or convicted of a crime by the US government. The only crime he was convicted of in the UK was a bail dumping charge where he got 11 months as long ago served that time and yet he's still in prison for going on more than three years now. They wouldn't let him out pending a trial the way they normally do. Do you think there's any validity to the theory that the US government, the Justice Department, doesn't really want to bring Julian onto US soil because of how much of this kind of sideshow, how much turbulence, how much bad imagery that will present to put somebody who is one of the most consequential journalists in the world on trial for espionage? Imprison, having people protest outside, this huge distraction, a kind of real compromising of US soft power, I think as well, that what they really wanted to do was just kind of break him physically and psychologically by keeping him in prison for as long as they can, and that there's really no desire to bring him to the US. Do you think that is what this is, that theory?

KH: Partly, I think it's correct that there is a little desire to have a trial in the US, partly because of the sympathy towards him and his cause, but also the media would have a field day and would actually be forced to put on some attention to the arguments that Julian can put on the table to prove the violations against him. And it's not a pretty story. You know, it is something that has not gotten a lot of attention in the mainstream media in the US. So I don't think there's a huge desire to get the case to the US. And it might partly explain why there's been this endless delay to keep the process going. And we could call it simply the punishment through process or lawfare or whatever you call it. And I think there's some validity in that position, but enough is enough. You know, this is going to be going on for way too long. Three and a half years now in a maximum security prison. And the United Kingdom...

GG: ...with no conviction.

KH: ...I think he is the longest serving remand prisoner in UK history in latter times, which is, you know.

GG: He's not in an easy prison. He's in a prison that the BBC in 2004 referred to as the British Guantanamo. It's a prison that's used for terrorist suspects or people convicted of terrorist crimes. And I want to talk about how things are going for him in a second. And before we do, just on this political front, one of the bizarre aspects of this case is that, you know, I've heard so many times people say that Julian is a traitor, that he's guilty of treason, as though he's a citizen of the United States, when in reality, he has almost no connection to the United States. I think he's been in the United States maybe once or twice at most for a few days. He's a citizen of Australia. Usually when a citizen of a country is caught in a situation like this with the US and the UK imprisoning him in such controversial ways, the government is outspoken in defence of its own citizen. The Australian government has notably been quite unsupportive, lately though there seem to be some changes. Are these changes cosmetic? Are they part of this sort of attempt to give the US an out? To say, Okay, well Australia is willing to take him back and wants him back, or is there a real change in government sentiment towards Julian?

KH: Well, Prime Minister Albanese was supportive of Julian before he took office and his party came to power earlier this year and incidentally, only a few days ago he was asked a question in Canberra, in Australia, in Parliament about his position, what he was going to do for Julian. And he said that he would use diplomatic means to end this, that enough is enough, he said. And so we have to see how that sort of works out in the diplomatic relations. But there has been a lot of reluctance in Australia and especially this period where the Conservatives were controlling the country. But there's an indication that there's a changed atmosphere and possibly an increased pressure on the US from Australia. But the interest there, the geopolitically interests of course are huge. We have the situation in the South China Sea defence interests and Australia is part of the Five Eyes spy programme of five nations, etc., etc.. But I thought it was interesting that actually this comment from Prime Minister

Albanese came the day after Lula came out so outspoken in the support. And as you said earlier, you cannot just dismiss Brazil as a player and especially Lula who has had this...

GG: ...they are a giant on the world stage.

KH: Remarkable resurrection. And you could see that on COP 27. And you could see that in the response with President Macron, who called him up like there was Christmas time...

GG: Yes, I was really-, I've been waiting for this call. Exactly.

KH: So if you look at modern history, this is one of the most spectacular comeback in politics in the world. And Brazil is a powerful player. And many who have been worried about the rising trend of the far right or the neo fascists or even just fascists, I don't want to- I don't care what do you call it, in Europe, in many countries you see Italy, going rising in Spain, Hungary, Poland and a lot of people in my part of the world are seeing actually a glimpse of hope in the pushback with Lula's victory. And that should not be underestimated. For these interests and for geopolitical interests, there is a focus now on Latin America. I want to mention here that before we came to Brazil, I met with the president of Colombia, Gustavo Petro, who said, Well, the Americans are now listening to us. And even this spectacular moment on October 27, when President Macron again was embracing Maduro, who was a person of non grata until oil interests kicked in.

GG: Yeah. I mean, South America is more important than ever for Europe, for the US. And that gives South American leaders a lot more leverage. So we don't have a lot of time left, so I want to make sure to ask you this. When the indictment was first unveiled against Julian, it was, I think, about six weeks before I was contacted by the person who became my source for the stories that we were able to do, that showed that Lula's conviction was corrupt, and that ultimately freed him from prison. And at the time I wrote an op ed in The Washington Post warning, trying to get other journalists to see the dangers that this indictment would essentially allow the criminalisation of all investigative journalists, because what it alleged that Julian did, that served as the basis for the indictment, is something investigative journalists do routinely. And ironically, the Brazilian government tried to prosecute me for that reporting that we ended up doing that freed Lula and used a very similar theory against me that the US government is using with Julian, namely that he crossed a line by working too closely with his source in a way that made him part of the conspiracy, which was the exact theory they tried to use to criminalise my journalism as well. Can you talk directly to the people who don't understand, especially in my profession, why this case extends far beyond WikiLeaks and really implicates the core foundational principles of whether we can have a free press?

KH: Well, this is basically criminalising journalism. I mean, it's very simple. And every journalist worth his salt should actually recognise that fact. It is criminalising the

journalist-source relation. And if you look at the indictment, you know, that little part of it, which is sometimes wrongly called the hacking charges, even though there's no hacking alleged in the indictment; Julian is not even indicted on it, that he has somehow helped the source to commit the crime. But all of this argument has been torn apart. But when you carefully look at this and you see the endangerment and this is the reason why the International Federation of Journalists and most free press associations have come on board and say there's a huge danger in this for general journalistic practices. And if you look through the wording of the indictment, I mean, it's ridiculous. One example, which is supposed to support the allegation of of conspiracy is alleged interaction between the journalist Julian Assange, they assume, and Chelsea Manning, where Chelsea says something of the nature of, Well, I think I'm dry, meaning that there's no more information and the reaction is on the other side, which they assume is Julian and haven't even proven that- "in my experience, curious eyes never run dry", quote unquote. I want to put that on a T-shirt. What journalist hasn't said to a source...

GG: ...get me more.

KH: Get me more.

GG: It is the nature of what journalists do.

KH: That's exactly what they're supposed to do.

GG: And that's why I say that when you're talking about using things like that that are so basic to the journalist-source relationship and of course, when a source comes to you and gives you things that are incredibly important, you want more. That's what you want, to dig more. You want to find more. That is your job, the role, your function as a journalist. If you can criminalise that, you can criminalise any journalist.

KH: And you talk about the precedent that was set and you actually suffered through the Bolsonaro approach in your case, which was basically a copy paste of Julian. So that is one precedent. So we're always talking about if he's actually extradited, you know, that will set a precedent. But it's already there. Shortly after, the editorial offices of the state broadcaster in Australia were raided and computers were confiscated in an attempt to go after a source. And you could see examples all over the world. It sort of had a rippling effect. And on the other side of the coin is the fact that despotic regimes have been using that as an example, as an excuse to suppress press freedom in their part of the world. You had the spokesman of the Russian foreign ministry, the Chinese authorities, and even the president of Azerbaijan telling off a BBC reporter, Why are you criticising what's going on in my country when you have Julian Assange, a respected journalist imprisoned in a dungeon in southeast London?

GG: I mean, it doesn't make that despot any less despotic, but it certainly means that the

United States has no moral credibility or the UK or European countries supporting this to lecture anyone about the importance of press freedom. I just have a couple of more questions because we're nearing the end of our time. One of the things I heard for years and still do here when defending Edward Snowden is, well, look, if you're so sure that he acted heroically, why doesn't he come back and try and convince a jury of his peers that that's true instead of staying hidden? Now, you referenced earlier what you said is your view that Julian would never get a fair trial in the US, either because they're charging him under a 100 year law that was enacted in 1917, the Espionage Act, to criminalise dissent against World War One and is written in order to assure a prosecution; the same they're charging Snowden with. But beyond that, what are the reasons when people say, Well, why didn't Julian just come out of that hole in Ecuador or in the Ecuadorian embassy or now agreeing to be extradited? If he's so clearly right, he'll be acquitted. Why is that untrue? Why won't he get a fair trial?

KH: Well, look at the venue, just for that matter. You called it just by his peers, you know, the venue with the Eastern District of Virginia court is called the spy court. And for what reason? 80% of the jury pool is actually drawn from people who have a direct or indirect through, you know, one link, a family member or a close associate who works for these agencies who have an interest in the case. So it is absolutely impossible to get a fair trial and just on that simple basis. And we have ten more arguments to pile on top of that. You know, the breach of the attorney client privilege, the stealing of the legal documents, the spying of the meetings that Julian had with his lawyers whilst he was in the Ecuadorian embassy conducted by the CIA under Mike Pompeo, the plot to assassinate or kidnap him, that has been exposed now a year ago in September...

GG: ...by a very incredible reporter, Mike Isikoff.

KH: But based on 30 sources named and unnamed, nobody has claimed, credibly, that this is not a reliable report. Very, very, very solid reporters. And actually in a very spectacular manner, Mike Pompeo, former director of CIA, actually confirmed the story in a way, by not denying the authenticity of it or saying this is all BS, it is simply not true. No, he went through other ways, that we need to get the sources of the story and put them on trial for breaching confidentiality. Well, thank you, Mike Pompeo. You just confirmed the authenticity of the story by doing that. And on we can go about the impossibility of him getting a fair trial including with all the outspoken condemnation of him by political leaders, by everybody in society. How are you going to get an impartial jury together to take the case on? And let's not forget the other thing. He is going to be put on pre-trial detention in the US, which can last for two or three years. And who will decide and can decide the condition under which he is held in the pre-trial period? That is the CIA. They can demand that he is put in solitary confinement the entire time.

GG: Under our laws that we have created after 9/11 to ensure that anyone who's accused of being a national security risk is basically put into a dungeon. Before I ask you my last

question, I just want to note one interesting and important thing that you said, that there's always been this paradox that Julian is very popular because of WikiLeaks, is very popular amongst Trump's base. People kind of do identify their politics not as a Republican, but as a MAGA supporter or a Trump supporter and yet this prosecution was not started by the Biden administration. They're certainly pursuing it aggressively. It was started under the Trump administration and was clearly led by Mike Pompeo, who gave a speech in 2017 as the director of the CIA before he became the Secretary of State, in which he vowed that he will do everything to ensure the destruction of WikiLeaks and argued that WikiLeaks does not have any First Amendment rights. And I think it's important to note that Mike Pompeo and the Trump administration were not bystanders in this, but Pompeo himself is really the person most responsible for the fact that these criminal charges are pending. Let me just ask as the last question, obviously, this case is really polarising politically. Julian and WikiLeaks are polarising. There are important legal implications and geopolitical implications, all of which we've discussed. This has obviously a really important personal component as well, that I don't want to overlook, which is we're talking about a human being, Julian Assange, who has effectively now been in various forms of detention for more than a decade despite never having been convicted of a crime. WikiLeaks was never convicted of a crime. Its only crime, as I said, was bail jumping because he sought legal refuge in asylum and obtained it by a sovereign state in Ecuador. What has that done to him? How is he doing physically? How is he doing it in terms of his mental health? There's been reports that he has suffered many strokes. There have been doctors warning that further detention of this kind could easily kill him or break him mentally forever. How is he doing?

KH: Well, Julian is an extremely resilient individual, and he is getting by. But I worry about him. He is a good friend of mine, I visit him in prison regularly as one of the two people outside his family and lawyers that they're able to visit. And I do worry for him every time I leave the prison. I mean, it's taking a toll. Three and a half years in this maximum security prison, you know, before that, seven years in the Ecuadorian Embassy and before that house arrest. So of course, it is taking a toll and it's about the time it ends. I want to throw in just one thing, which I think is of interest. It hasn't gotten any attention. The simple fact that demanding his extradition is a violation of the United States and the United Kingdom extradition treaty, which has been enforced for I don't know, I think more than 100 years. Because that treaty exempts extradition for political offences. And so you can't charge someone with the purest form of a political offence, which is espionage, and then demand extradition on the basis of the treaty that actually exempts that. And interesting enough this was pointed out a few days ago to me that in 1985, then Senator Joe Biden was vigorously opposing the extradition of a suspected IRA terrorist in those days from the US to Margaret Thatcher's government. Ronald Reagan, at the time was trying to twist the treaty to facilitate the extradition of this suspect IRA terrorist to London. Joe Biden rallied in the Senate and they were able to stop it. And there's a letter that is now circulating online in the Irish media pointing that fact out, that he claimed that this was the holiest of every holy rule, you don't take away this security measurement in the extradition treaty. We don't touch it. We even let

some bad guys go. Don't touch that.

GG: Because it's not just a unique aspect of British-US extradition. It's a general principle in extradition law internationally. So before I let you go, you know, you mentioned that the key thing people can do is political pressure. That's the most important thing now, as opposed to any chance to get justice in a court of law. Is there anything else that you want people to know? And I'm sure people watching are going to be wondering, well, political pressure matters, what is it that I should be doing or could be doing?

KH: Well, just familiarise with the case and try to dive through the smokescreen and get to the core of the case, which is the press freedom issue in it. People here in Latin America on our tour here have no problem actually fathoming; they are so near to their heart. They understand what's at stake here. And, you know, our mission in this Latin American tour is to meet the leaders of the countries here. And I want to be able to say that when it ends, that the entire continent, the continent stays firmly behind the cause. And not just for Julian Assange, but what this case stands for. It is the most gravest attack on press freedom in modern times.

GG: Christian, thank you so much for taking the time. I know you have an incredibly busy schedule as you travel through South America. It was great to meet you in person and to be able to talk about what I also regard as the most important press freedom case of our generation. So thanks very much.

KH: Thanks for having me as well.

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