



CRUSHING DISSENT: GoFundMe Freezes Funds to Anti-War Outlet 'The Grayzone'

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): One of the weapons that has a very similar objective as the surveillance regime and the censorship regime, which is to control dissent and dissidents and to ultimately banish all dissent and to criminalise it and outlaw it, is a weapon that has actually been around for at least a decade, but really only began receiving a lot of attention when last year in Canada there was a peaceful protest by truckers and other Canadian citizens protesting the draconian lockdown measures and mandates of the Canadian government. And in response, Justin Trudeau's government without any due process, without bringing criminal charges against anyone, froze the bank accounts of anyone the government deemed in their unilateral and unreviewable determination to be supportive of in any way of that protest. They just froze people's funds, denied people access to the financial system on which their substance and ability to support their family depends.

Now, this has been an increasingly escalating weapon as part of the censorship regime, as part of the effort to convert and degrade the Internet into a surveillance regime that has not gotten enough attention. And one of the reasons is that there is a perception, a very inaccurate perception, that all of this censorship and surveillance and exclusion from the financial services system is aimed at one group and one group only, which are political conservatives. It is true that conservatism, particularly the kind of populist right wing conservatism that has become much more powerful with Donald Trump and with movements in Western Europe has become a true threat to establishment power. And therefore they are very often the targets of these kinds of weapons. But it's not only them who are. There are also anti-establishment dissidents and critics on the left or who aren't really categorizable by traditional left to right labels, who also have been targeted in many ways with those sorts of abuses.

And yesterday, a site that has editors and reporters that has long been associated with the left, which is The Grayzone; they are highly critical of US foreign policy, of US imperialism, of

neoconservatism, of war, of US policy in Israel. I'm sure some of you in this audience disagree vehemently with some of their views. Does it matter at all for what the story is about, anymore than it matters whether people who are censored or imprisoned for their political views have views that you agree with or not?! What matters is that they are dissidents from establishment power, agree with them or not, and they are starting to suffer the kinds of punishments that we have covered frequently on this show, including now being denied the ability to use the digital financial system to solicit fundraising support.

So what happened – and we will talk to its founder and editor, Max Blumenthal, in just a bit – is something that was reported by The Grayzone itself on August 28th. There you see the headline of The Grayzone article, which is Gofundme Freezes Grayzone Fundraiser, quote, "due to some external concerns". There you see the headline and that is the logo of Gofundme and you see what the Grayzone's message to Gofundme is after hearing what it is that Gofundme did. Now many of you already know that Gofundme has increasingly become highly politicised to the point where they have already banned and frozen the funds of all sorts of politicised projects that they regard as a threat to establishment power. But a lot of people use Gofundme before any of that was true. I have a non-profit here in Brazil, for example, that I founded with my husband in 2016, that is a shelter that takes care of abandoned animals, dogs and cats. And the thing that makes it unique is that we employ people who are homeless on the street with their animals based on this unique connection between homeless people and their animals and we wanted to capture that relationship that so unique by creating a special kind of animal shelter that employs homeless people, that teaches them how to transition up the street to earn income, to open bank accounts and the like. And that was something that we began fundraising on Gofundme at a time when Gofundme was not controversial. And it worked for us because it's not a political project, it's simply a non-governmental organisation that people on the left and the right have supported and continue to support. And The Grayzone did the same. Use Gofundme before Gofundme became yet another tool of establishment attacks on dissidents. So you can blame the victim if you want saying that, Oh anyone who uses Gofundme gets what's coming to them. But a lot of people like The Grayzone invested in Gofundme used it as their primary source of financing or at least one of them. And you shouldn't blame the victim. You should blame the increasingly menacing weapon that is being used.

And we want to put this into context for you. So first, let's look at what happened with Grayzone. According to the site itself, quote "Gofundme has indefinitely frozen donations to The Grayzone, quote 'due to some external concerns'. The company's actions follow a campaign of repression against our personnel by the British and Ukrainian governments. The Silicon Valley-based crowdfunding site Gofundme has informed The Grayzone that it has frozen all money raised in our recent fundraiser". They didn't just close the account. They're freezing people's hard earned dollars that they decided they wanted to give to The Grayzone to support their independent journalism, which over the past year has largely been devoted to opposing the Biden administration's policies in Ukraine. "Our initiative was devoted to

providing independent journalist Wyatt Reed, Kit Klarenberg and Alex Rubinstein with long-term positions. On August 19th, when we demanded to know why Gofundme has refused to authorise the transfer of the funds we raised, a member of the site's Trust and Safety Team identifying themselves simply as 'Sabrina' emailed" – Do you see how Kafkaesque all this is? Your site gets frozen with no process, your funds get frozen. A fake person communicates it to you using what is probably automated messaging. They don't have any obligation to tell you the real reason they've done it. They really do that and you rarely have any appeal.

It's purely arbitrary, invisible authority reaching into your funds and seizing them for purely political reasons. This is what Sabrina told the Grayzone, quote, "Our number one goal here is ensuring that the money from Gofundme fundraisers always gets to the right place, so we really appreciate you helping us to make sure Gofundme is a safe place to give. Due to some external concerns, we need to review your fundraiser to make sure it complies with our Terms of Service. Please keep in mind that our processes are followed to ensure our own safety. I'll keep you updated as soon as possible". "By this point, we had raised over \$90,000 from 1100 contributors. And now Gofundme is holding the donations hostage, refusing to transfer them to us, while failing to inform donors that it has effectively seized their money. The for profit site has similarly refused to explain its freezing of their donations, issuing nothing more than a vague allusion – quote 'some external concerns' – to pressure from powerful outside forces. Gofundme has also arbitrarily removed the fundraising campaigns of the antiwar alternative media outlet MintPress News, and banned the website from its platform also without explanation".

Now I have known about what has happened to Gofundme and as a result, a new non-profit that we are announcing next week that I talked about before, which is the David Miranda Institute, which is an institute designed to memorialise the work and legacy of my recently deceased husband, and to build on that work, we deliberately decided and realised we can't rely on Gofundme to raise funds because that does have political overtones and my politics could jeopardise the ability of that institute to safely raise money on that site. And the idea that we now all have to segregate into financial services based on what our political views are and in many ways risk being excluded entirely, none of us can live without, for example, access to banks and the ability to receive money from them is something that is extremely alarming. Now, to prove that Grayzone is considered a true menace to establishment authority is extremely easy to do. Two weeks ago, we interviewed one of the co-founders of Wikipedia, Larry Sanger, who warned that Wikipedia has become completely untrustworthy. We showed you some examples of how the political pages on Wikipedia are almost entirely written, almost in a way that is so extreme that it's a parody to mimic establishment orthodoxies and to defame and malign anyone who challenges those orthodoxies. So here is Wikipedia's page, and you can just immediately tell what Wikipedia is about and what The Greyzone is by reading just the first paragraph. Quote, "The Grayzone is an American far left news website and blog founded and edited by American journalist Max Blumenthal. The website, initially

founded as The Grayzone Project, was affiliated with AlterNet before becoming independent in early 2018. A fringe website, it is known for misleading reporting and sympathetic coverage of authoritarian regimes. The Grayzone has denied human rights abuses against Uyghurs, posted conspiracy theories about Venezuela, Xinjiang, Syria and other regions, and posted pro-Russian propaganda during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Grayzone writers such as Max Blumenthal and Aaron Maté acted as briefers on behalf of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations at UN meetings organised by Russia. The Grayzone's news content is generally considered to be fringe and the website maintains a pro-Kremlin editorial line, centred around an opposition to the foreign policy of the United States and a desire for a multipolar world. The website has supported the government.." Okay, you get the point.

Every single insult, every single trope, every single attempt to malign someone's character for opposing establishment pieties, you're immediately declared disloyal. If you oppose the US war policies, you're declared loyal to foreign states. The United States government partners with the most tyrannical and authoritarian regimes in the world. If you go to the Wikipedia pages of US officials, you won't see anything there about how they praised authoritarian regimes like those in Riyadh or Cairo or throughout Latin America or Asia, with whom the United States has constantly partnered, not despite the fact that they're authoritarian, but because of it. Or news sites that spread the lies that the Hunter Biden laptop was Russian disinformation or Donald Trump urinated on a prostitute while Vladimir Putin taped it and used it as blackmail leverage to control the United States government. All those insane conspiracy theories that the New York Times and NBC News spread. You won't see those words on the first paragraph or anywhere else on those media outlets websites, because it is there to prop up establishment propaganda and those who serve it while demeaning and maligning enemies of establishment orthodoxy, which clearly includes The Grayzone. Wyatt Reed, who was recently hired as the managing editor of The Grayzone on Twitter or the site formerly known as Twitter, reported the following. "First it was PayPal, and now Venmo has permanently deactivated my account, citing an unspecified rules violation. Their email says, quote, 'We do not divulge our decision making criteria', so we won't be getting an explanation". This was Wyatt Reed reporting this, on November 9th, 2022. So they've been targeting this crowd at Grayzone for a long time. This is him losing access, both to PayPal and then Venmo, crucial sites for receiving payments for work or support from donors if you're an independent journalist.

If you're an independent journalist, you cannot function without a way to collect donations electronically. And so if these sites simply terminate the accounts of any independent media that questions establishment orthodoxy as they are doing, it will destroy a free press. Here's the letter from Venmo. The email from Venmo that he received on November 8th, 2022. There you see it from Venmo. You have a new message. "Hello, Wyatt. My name is Sandilvia on behalf of Venmo". She's probably Sabrina's sister. "Thank you for taking the time to reach out to us. While we encourage the use of Venmo, we must ensure our users abide by the user

agreement. After reviewing your account, we have found that your actions and activity have been in violation of this agreement. As a result, your account has been permanently deactivated as of June 28th, 2022, and we regret to inform you that you can no longer offer the Venmo service. We do not make these decisions lightly and when we do so, it is to help ensure that Venmo continues to be a safe way to make payments. If we have any questions regarding this decision, please note that we do not divulge our decision making criteria in order to protect the systems that monitor activity on Venmo. I apologise that we are unable to assist you further". So that's it. Now, Wyatt Reed is not a criminal. He hasn't been charged with any criminal conduct. He's a journalist, an independent journalist who has views that the establishment dislikes. And this is what considers him unsafe to be able to use the financial system just shortly after he joins Grayzone. They are now kicked off of Gofundme. He himself has been kicked off of Venmo and PayPal. Now, as I said, there are, of course, many, many examples of more recent uses of this weaponry. I think the Canadian example got the most attention, but I first became aware of it, the first time I ever saw it was back in 2010, in December of 2010, specifically when I was at Salon, and this was the year that WikiLeaks released its Iraq and Afghanistan war files, as well as the diplomatic cables that made WikiLeaks and Julian Assange the number one enemy of the US security state and the endless war machine that runs Washington. This is the publication for which Julian Assange is now being prosecuted and extradited to the United States; this exact publication.

So back in 2010, before they found a way to prosecute Julian Assange, what they decided to do instead was to crush and destroy WikiLeaks through extrajudicial punishments by insisting and coercing financial services companies on which WikiLeaks and everybody else depends. MasterCard and Visa and the Bank of America and PayPal to just close WikiLeaks accounts without convicting them of any crime, without charging them with any crime, simply because neocon scumbags in Washington like Senator Joe Lieberman, the chairman of the House of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, demanded that that be done. Here's the article I wrote when it happened. There you see the headline, "Joe Lieberman emulates Chinese dictators". Quote, "The Connecticut Senator pressures Amazon to block Americans from viewing WikiLeaks Documents. Talking Points Memo – in an article headlined: "How Lieberman Got Amazon to Drop WikiLeaks' – detailed that Lieberman's, quote, 'staffers' called Amazon to ask about it and left questions with the press secretary, including, 'Are there any plans to take the site down?' Shortly thereafter, Amazon called back to say that they had kicked WikiLeaks off. Lieberman's spokeswoman said, quote, "Senator Lieberman hopes that the Amazon case will send the message that other companies that might host WikiLeaks, that it would be irresponsible to host the site.' That Joe Lieberman is abusing his position as Homeland Security Chairman to thuggish dictate to private companies which websites they should and should not host – and more important, what you can and cannot read on the Internet – is one of the most pernicious acts by a US senator in quite some time. Josh Marshall wrote yesterday, quote, 'When I'd heard that Amazon had agreed to host WikiLeaks, I was frankly surprised given all the fish a big corporation Amazon has to fry with the federal government'. That's true of all large corporations that own media outlets – every one of them

– and that is one big reason why they're so servile to US Government interests and easily manipulated by those in political power. That's precisely the dynamic Lieberman was exploiting with his menacing little phone call to Amazon (in essence: Hi, this is the Senate's Homeland Security Committee calling: you're going to be taking down that WikiLeaks site right away, right?) Amazon, of course, did what they were told."

This was a prelude to what the US government is now doing with Facebook and Google and Twitter; picking up the phone: Hi, it's the CIA. You know that tweet that got posted questioning our policies in Ukraine? Or: Hello, this is the CDC. You know that tweet questioning the efficacy of vaccine mandates and masks. You're going to take that down, right? Because we regard that as dangerous. And you wouldn't want to make us determine that you are a danger as well by allowing those tweets and those posts and that speech to remain up. This was how this was created. This was how it was pioneered. Two days later, Reuters on December 4th, reported the following quote, "PayPal suspends WikiLeaks donations accounts". "The online payment service PayPal said it has suspended the WikiLeaks' account that the organisation used to collect donations. US based PayPal said in a statement that WikiLeaks, which this week released thousands of secret US diplomatic cables, had violated its policy. A posting on WikiLeaks' Twitter page said, quote, 'PayPal bans WikiLeaks after US government pressure'. A statement on the PayPal site said, quote, 'PayPal has permanently restricted the account used by WikiLeaks due to a violation of the PayPal Acceptable Use Policy, which states that our payment service cannot be used for any activities that encourage, promote, facilitate or instruct others to engage in illegal activity. We've notified the account holder of this action'. PayPal is one of several ways that WikiLeaks takes in donations to finance its operations. On Friday, WikiLeaks directed readers to a web address in Switzerland after two U.S. Internet providers dropped it in the space of two days".

Shortly thereafter, Visa, MasterCard and the Bank of America also all closed WikiLeaks' account, telling the independent media outlet that it would no longer process donations to the site. Basically, Joe Lieberman and his comrades in the CIA crushed or tried to crash an independent media outlet by excluding them completely from the financial services system. Without bothering to convict them of any crime. It was purely extrajudicial punishment of a press organisation in retaliation for the reporting that WikiLeaks was doing. And whatever theory they wanted to use to justify it, Oh, WikiLeaks is encouraging illegal activity by encouraging or showing sources how to communicate with them anonymously. The New York Times, The Guardian, The Washington Post, almost every other media outlet was doing the same. But of course, those media outlets serve rather than challenge establishment orthodoxy for the most part, and didn't present the same kind of threat.

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