



Assange's brother: "Julian could receive the death penalty" if extradited

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Max Blumenthal (MB): Gabriel Shipton, what brings you to Washington, DC?

Gabriel Shipton (GS): We're here off the back of Julian's hearing, so his appeal hearing in the UK, and here to lobby Congress, and the Senate around Resolution 934, which is a free Julian resolution. That's in Committee, in the Congress, in the House.

MB: So if you had any breakthroughs with members of Congress?

GS: Yeah, look. I think since the end of last year, we've got, you know, Jim McGovern has come on board. And I think having him – he's quite senior in the Democratic Party – having him on board has made a massive difference. He hosted a briefing on Monday with Agnes Callamard from Amnesty International, Jodie Ginsberg from CPA (Committee to Protect Journalists), and that briefing was full. They had to turn people away. You know, so I think there's a real momentum building around the interest in the case in the Congress. So I think you can see a constituency for Julian growing in the Congress, specifically in the House.

MB: And what are you asking lawmakers for? What are you asking them to do for Julian Assange?

GS: We want them to come forward and support this resolution, so that it could potentially get a vote. I think we're looking for around 20 co-sponsors, on the resolution. So we're asking them directly to do that and also be vocal supporters or, you know, call this prosecution out, you know, for what it is: an attack on press freedom, an attack on First Amendment rights of Americans. So, yeah, that's ideally what we're asking them to do; similar to what, you know, other Congress people have done in the past, you know, like Marjorie Taylor Greene or Jim McGovern, who are now vocally calling on the Biden administration to end this prosecution.

MB: On this resolution, I mean, what do you think it says about the politics of the U.S. when Marjorie Taylor Greene on one side is supporting it, and then you have Chuy Garcia and

Ilhan Omar on the other side supporting it, what does it say about the politics of the moment?

GS: Well, I think when I'm like [inaudible] I guess people always talk about this horseshoes politics with, you know, the left and the right, the far left and right are actually closer together than the centrists. So I think to me, that is really powerful. And, you know, I think these two camps often agree on things, but are kept apart or kept split apart. But when they're united, I believe they're very strong and able to, you know, get things done. So to me, Julian's issue does this around the world, unites the left and right together. You know, we've seen that in Australia and now we're seeing it in the Congress. So I think it's really powerful.

MB: Have you had any interactions with the Biden administration or any indication of where they stand on continuing to prosecute Julian Assange?

GS: No, not since the proceedings happened. But time I would see, back in September, we visited the DOJ with a group of Australian parliamentarians. And, you know, the DOJ were adamant pursuing this case, and pushing forward for prosecution and to have Julian extradited. So my indication from the Biden administration is that they're wholeheartedly pursuing this prosecution.

MB: So you were just in London for the latest round of court proceedings. Tell us what happened there and how is Julian doing?

GS: Well, so, a two day hearing in the Royal Courts of Justice. It was the first time Julian's defence was able to introduce the CIA plots, that, you know, were against Julian and that emanated under Mike Pompeo, when he became CIA director after the Vault 7 leaks. So it was, you know, the first time that you had all these establishment journalists in the court, who had to hear that out. And the judges were taking notice of it and listening to the arguments. And so it sort of validated that story for a lot of these mainstream journalists, which was very, very interesting and a real opportunity for Julian's defence. The judges, I think, my impression was that the judges were more engaged than in past hearings. And I believe that they knew that they were under a lot of scrutiny and political pressure that was coming from countries like Australia, who just the week before the hearing had passed a resolution through the Australian Parliament calling on the U.K. and the U.S. to bring it to a close and send Julian back to Australia. So I believe the judges there were feeling the pressure to really behave like they were giving this proper airing. So that was interesting. And then I think one of the interesting parts about it was, you know, when the prosecution were talking about the case and they couldn't rule out that Julian would not receive a death penalty if he was extradited to the United States. So the judges asked the prosecutors: "Can you rule out that Julian will not be sentenced to – will not receive a death penalty?" and they, the prosecution, had to outright say: "No, we can't rule that out. That if he's extradited, that he could potentially, receive a death penalty". But there was also another interesting moment where the judge said to the prosecution: "So, you know, what you're saying is that any journalist in the United Kingdom could be extradited to the United States under these rules?". And the prosecution had to say: "Yes, it would apply to any journalist in the United Kingdom". So, you know, having these things aired in court and reported on by all these legacy media

journalists was, I think, quite good for Julian's case; to have that all aid in court. In terms of Julian, I went to see him last week. And look, it's scary, you know, scary seeing him in the prison. He was – yeah, it was... I didn't have a, you know, usually we go and laugh and have a joke, but this time, I found it quite scary that scene, inside the prison.

MB: Why was it scary to see him?

GS: I just fear, I'm just scared for his health, his physical well-being and his mental health. Going through that hearing process, I think, was very wearing on him, and you never know how you are going to find him when you go and visit. There [inaudible] I didn't talk to him on the phone or anything. So they're always very anxious visits for me. It's good to see him, of course, but, yeah, I felt that, you know, I left feeling more worried about him than I have in the past.

MB: So why do you think it was important to outline the CIA plots against Julian in front of the court? And in front of legacy media? Why was this so central to the case?

GS: Well, so the CIA plots; so in 2017, when Mike Pompeo became CIA director during the Trump administration, one of his first speeches was essentially outlining how they were going to go after WikiLeaks, how he, as CIA director, would lead attacks on WikiLeaks and he made this sort of novel legal definition, where they define WikiLeaks as a non-state, hostile intelligence agency. And what this meant was that they could begin clandestine operations against WikiLeaks, without any oversight from – any congressional oversight. You know, and those clandestine operations were similar to what they could do to, say the Iranian Secret Service. So at that point, you saw the Ecuadorian embassy become almost like a CIA black site in the middle of London. The security company who was supposed to be protecting Julian, ended up being co-opted by the CIA. And they installed new high definition cameras, listening devices everywhere, and recorded all Julian's meetings with his lawyers, with his doctors. But they also had plots to kidnap Julian from the embassy, plots to murder Julian. And these plots made it all the way to the White House. And what some reporting on this is, that was brought up in the court to just show the really bad political nature of this prosecution, was the plot to kidnap Julian. The DOJ said to the CIA, "Look if you kidnap him, where are you going to put him? We don't have anything, you know – you can't just put him in a black site. Just hang tight. And we'll get some charges together, and we'll get an indictment together and then you can take him out of the embassy". So, hearing that in court really spoke to the political motivation behind this prosecution. And essentially, it was Mike Pompeo going off the deep end, right?! And going totally rogue, and going after a publisher with, you know, everything they had; all the tools that they had and weaponized the DOJ, to, you know, get revenge, for being embarrassed because they lost control of the CIA hacking tools. So it was important because under the extradition treaty, there is a carve out for political charges. You cannot be extradited for political charges. And so establishing the political motivation behind the Espionage Act indictment, was very important in the court, to have that aid because it speaks directly to that carve out in the extradition treaty.

MB: So the point is that with these CIA plots against him, which we exposed and

documented at the Grayzone, he had his rights completely violated. His attorney client privilege was violated. And basically, what you're saying is there's no way he could have a free and fair trial in the U.S.

GS: Yes, exactly right. And, I think, you know, what's happening to Julian is almost like another leak in itself. You know, it exposes how all these institutions can be corrupted and used as weapons against, you know, people who expose state criminality. So, I think, you know, if you look back to the Pentagon Papers and what happened with Daniel Ellsberg's, with the plumbers and Daniel Ellsberg's spying on – they broke into Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist office, and that was led to, you know, his case being thrown out of court. But it also formed part of Nixon's impeachment. And so, I think, you know, this sort of going off the deep end and engaging these institutions like that, can have real consequences to those in power.

MB: As we documented at the Grayzone, members of legacy media outlets like The Washington Post had their devices taken by CIA agents at the Ecuadorian embassy posing as security guards. Those devices were hacked. Those reporters knew that happened. They found out later, and the media said nothing. Do you think the media's attitude, the legacy media, mainstream media's attitude towards Julian has changed at all since then?

GS: Well, there was some reporting around the proceedings, but not not a whole lot in the United States. What was really interesting is the media coverage in the UK. There was a real demand for voices that had Julian's perspective. So myself, Julian's wife Stella, Kristinn Hrafnsson, my dad, we were all running around doing every single media show in the United Kingdom. We couldn't fulfil the demand for voices from Julian's side. So I think that was an interesting development that is different; it is a different sort of vibe now in the United Kingdom. But definitely in the U.S., I mean, I think you're speaking of, what's her name?

MB: Yeah, it was Ellen Nakashima from The Washington Post.

GS: Yes. Ellen Nakashima, who had, you know, devices spied on, but hasn't written about it. So, yeah, but, you know, it's a bit of a head scratcher and sort of says more about them than it does about, you know, about Julian or our side.

MB: So after this latest round of court proceedings, is there any outcome you expect or do you think they will kick the can down the road and allow some more appeals and allow this to keep going through November?

GS: So, that is potentially an outcome; is that they approve, you know, some very sort of narrow points of the appeal for a hearing down the track, Julian remains in prison. You know, it's still that lingering message there for anybody who wants to publish this sort of material that, you know, you'll be engaged in an endless court proceeding and be kept in a maximum security prison without any conviction. You know, he's not even charged with anything in the United Kingdom, but they've been keeping him in jail for five years. So, I think that is an outcome that sort of suits the status quo, in that sense. But there's a very real chance that they

will refuse the application to appeal and order the extradition. And then he could be extradited quite quickly to the United States. And I would imagine that, yeah, in the run up to the election, they really don't want this sort of case here. I mean, I don't know how they think. Maybe they do. You know, maybe they want to silence more of these independent voices that are growing stronger and stronger, in the lead up to the election. So perhaps they do want to have an Espionage Act prosecution against the publisher just to ram at home for the press here in the United States that if, you know, you speak out against the regime, you know, we're not scared of going after you.

MB: And what about restrictions on free speech in the UK, like the new National Security Act, which explicitly was crafted in Parliament to attack WikiLeaks and prevent other WikiLeaks like organisations from rising to the fore. Is there any free speech left in that country?

GS: Yeah, I would say, on these issues, I would say there really isn't. And, you know, other than the independent voices that people are turning to more and more now, I'd say that the legacy and sort of institutional media is, you know, is – I guess Julian spoke about this and saw this problem a long. You know, they're an arm of the state, essentially. And they work hand in glove with these institutions to sell the public wars. And Julian spoke about this, that's probably part of the reason he created WikiLeaks. So, I mean, they can make all these security laws that they want, but at the end of the day, you know, I think we have to acknowledge that these institutions are working with the state to sell the public things that they don't like.

MB: And the media, the UK media, is totally obedient to the state when a D-notice is imposed.

GS: Well, they all get together and decide what to publish, essentially. And it's a little bit more official than it is and it's a little bit more, you know, they've got the D-notice group in the U.K., so it's a little bit more official in how it works here in the U.S.

MB: And here in the U.S. the CIA just comes to The New York Times and tells it, Hey, we need our black budget approved by Congress, can you write this story about all the fantastic work we've been doing in Ukraine? And The New York Times readily obliges?.

GS: Yeah and you have that sort of revolving door between these institutions, you know, institutions of state and the media organisations. You know, people leave the CIA and go and get a job at CNN. So, it's a little bit of a different formula, but I think it's the same.

MB: So if Julian is extradited to the U.S., then what comes next? What is the next stage of this struggle, and what is the responsibility of activists and grassroots forces here in the U.S.?

GS: Well, I mean, if Julian comes here, we're going to need a mass mobilisation of activists to really come out on the streets, on this. And we're always asking people to engage with their representatives and, you know, we've seen that be successful in other places in the world; you know, protesting outside their offices, going and meeting with them, phoning them, sending

cards, sending emails, you know, running around Congress, getting in their faces like CodePink does, all those things are great and, you know, work to sort of move the needle, on the support for Julian with lawmakers. And we've seen around the world that, or particularly in Australia, that once we get that flow on from the activists into the Parliament or into the Congress, then that can have an effect on the leadership as well in their decisions. So that's the sort of path that we always encourage people to go.

MB: Gabriel Shipton, thanks for sharing your insights with us at The Grayzone.

GS: Yeah. Thank you. Thanks, Max.

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