



JD Vance SLAMS European Leaders for Extreme Censorship Laws & Undermining True Democracy

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Since Wednesday night, to start with the last 24 hours, there have been a series of truly remarkable and radical policy announcements and speeches and new frameworks unveiled that, taken on the aggregate, are really extraordinary and worthy of all of our attention. The first one was last night in the Oval Office, Donald Trump himself said this about military spending in the United States.

Donald Trump: One of the first meetings I want to have is with President Xi of China, President Putin of Russia, and I want to say let's cut our military budget in half. And we can do that. And I think we'll be able to do it.

GG: Now, there were a lot of liberal types and leftist types who ought to be very welcoming of that announcement. Obviously, cutting military spending was supposedly a priority of the liberal left of the United States for decades, yet no Democratic president for a long, long time has even alluded to it, let alone advocated it in the way Trump just did. And in order to justify their confusion about this, they all said, oh, these are just words. It is true, as of now, they're just words. They haven't yet cut the military budget by 50%. Trump has been in office for about three seconds.

But the mere announcement that this is something Trump wants to do, in and of itself, is an acknowledgement that the United States' military budget, which is rapidly approaching a trillion dollars a year – it's about \$870 billion a year, far, far more than any other country spends – it's an acknowledgement that it's basically double what it needs to be in order for the United States to be safe. If Trump believes, as he just said, that the United States can cut its military budget by 50% and still remain safe, that is an acknowledgement of the extraordinary waste that the Pentagon consumes. And the fact that he wants to do this in conjunction with China and Russia after years of extremely bellicose rhetoric about the

US-Chinese relationship is also very promising, given that it is a sign that Trump wants to improve relations and work diplomatically where possible, not only with the largest nuclear-armed state, which is Russia, but a major nuclear power in China as well. Something that no Democrat would ever have even hinted at or alluded to, the rhetoric about China has been extremely hawkish for a long time.

It signals, obviously, to Beijing and to Moscow that Trump wants to open up diplomatic relations. It doesn't mean he's going to give them everything they want. It doesn't mean that an agreement will be possible. And, in fact, there's reason for the Chinese and the Russians to be skeptical of this proposal, including the fact that if China cut its military spending by 50%, even if the United States did so as well, that would still put the Chinese and the Russians especially, way behind where the United States is. The Chinese have already indicated skepticism about this deal. But the fact that Trump, out of the blue, announced it so definitively – "I want to meet with the Chinese and the Russians to cut defense spending by 50%" – is a strong signal to Americans about the priorities of this administration. He has no reason to say any of that. If he didn't mean it, there's no political gain from it. There's no election that he has to face re-elections. This is obviously something that he believes the United States can sustain and can afford to do, and in fact has to do, cut military spending. There's no way to cut government spending or waste in any meaningful way without, as Steve Bannon put it, crossing the Potomac and heading toward the Pentagon. And Trump's announcement just three weeks into his presidency of something so radical is a very promising sign of how they're thinking.

Equally significant, if not more so, is what the Vice President, J.D. Vance, said today at the Munich Security Conference where he went to speak to essentially European elites, European officials, and he spoke to them in highly critical ways, in ways that you do not often hear American officials talking to or about Europe, even though so much of what he said is so plainly accurate. It was a really remarkable speech, extremely well-constructed and well-delivered, but the substance of it was by far the most important. Here's part of it.

J.D. Vance (JDV): I look to Brussels where EU Commissars warn citizens that they intend to shut down social media during times of civil unrest the moment they spot what they've judged to be, quote, "hateful content". Or to this very country where police have carried out raids against citizens suspected of posting anti-feminist comments online as part of, quote, "combating misogyny on the Internet", a day of action. I look to Sweden where two weeks ago the government convicted a Christian activist for participating in Quran burnings that resulted in his friend's murder. And as the judge in his case chillingly noted, Sweden's laws to supposedly protect free expression do not, in fact, grant, and I'm quoting, "a free pass to do or say anything without risking offending the group that holds that belief". And perhaps most concerning, I look to our very dear friends, the United Kingdom, where the backslide away from conscience rights has placed the basic liberties of religious Britons in particular in the crosshairs. A little over two years ago, the British government charged Adam Smith Connor, a 51-year-old physiotherapist and an Army veteran with the heinous crime of standing 50 meters from an abortion clinic and silently praying for three minutes, not obstructing anyone,

not interacting with anyone, just silently praying on his own. And after British law enforcement spotted him and demanded to know what he was praying for, Adam replied simply, it was on behalf of the unborn son he and his former girlfriend had aborted years before. Now, the officers were not moved. Adam was found guilty of breaking the government's new buffer zones law, which criminalizes silent prayer and other actions that could influence a person's decision within 200 meters of an abortion facility. He was sentenced to pay thousands of pounds in legal costs to the prosecution. Now, I wish I could say that this was a fluke, a one-off, crazy example of a badly written law being enacted against a single person. But no, this last October, just a few months ago, the Scottish government began distributing letters to citizens whose houses lay within so-called safe access zones, warning them that even private prayer within their own homes may amount to breaking the law. Naturally, the government urged readers to report any fellow citizens suspected guilty of thought crime. In Britain and across Europe, free speech, I fear, is in retreat.

GG: Now, a couple parts about this passage. You could make the argument that this is an example of the United States government trying to interfere in the affairs of other countries. The Europeans have a much more constrained and constricted view about free speech than the United States does. And on some level, you can say that's their right. And why is J.D. Vance over there telling them how they should think about free speech? But the broader context here for the speech, as we're about to show you, was that the foundation of EU policy and EU foreign policy in the world is that the whole point of the US-EU relationship is that we promote our shared democratic values, our promotion of democracy, when in fact the Europeans are constantly acting in undemocratic, anti-democratic ways by doing things like censoring the Internet in ways that J.D. Vance just outlined and by trying to simply overturn the outcome of elections in Georgia, in Romania, and elsewhere whenever they dislike their outcome – the very antithesis of promoting democratic values.

Now, the other thing I want to say about J.D. Vance's remarks here, as much as I support them, obviously, for obvious reasons, is that some of the most extreme forms of censorship in European countries are those imposed against Israel critics – in Germany in particular. Not only did they ban pro-Palestinian marches while allowing pro-Israel marches, they have arrested an enormous number of people, including German Jews, for giving speeches critical of Israel, for critiquing the war, for engaging in activism. They have, not only Germany, but in the UK as well and in France, interrogated people continuously through the police who appear at events designed to criticize Israel, simply using free expression of the kind that are the same as the examples that he gave. And of course, politically, it's very difficult for JD Vance to include those kinds of examples in his denunciation of European censorship, but make no mistake, that is a major part of how free speech is being eroded, not just in the EU but also in the United States in ways that we've repeatedly reported. So it would be good to have denunciations of censorship not just of the ideas that J.D. Vance feels aligned with, anti-abortion protesters or other forms of conservatives whose speech has definitely been constrained in the EU and deserves denunciation, but as a principle across the board.

Nonetheless, online censorship has, in many ways, been driven by the EU and by the UK, and so having the United States go and give such a rousing defense of free speech is something that ought to be applauded. Now, like I said, if it were just that, you could raise the same objection that a lot of countries have raised in the United States. Why are you coming and telling us how to conduct our own affairs? If we, the Germans or the British or whoever, want to constrict free speech in ways that you don't consider acceptable in the United States, who are you to tell us we can't do that? But the broader point, as J.D. Vance said, is that the whole relationship is supposed to be about promoting democratic values, and it doesn't work if Europe is, in fact, engaging in exactly the opposite. Here's how he described this.

JDV: ...and sounded delighted that the Romanian government had just annulled an entire election. He warned that if things don't go to plan, the very same thing could happen in Germany, too. Now, these cavalier statements are shocking to American ears. For years, we've been told that everything we fund and support is in the name of our shared democratic values. Everything from our Ukraine policy to digital censorship is billed as a defense of democracy. But when we see European courts canceling elections and senior officials threatening to cancel others, we ought to ask whether we're holding ourselves to an appropriately high standard.

GG: Now, this critique obviously applies just as much to the United States. In fact, the freezing of funding for the National Endowment for Democracy, though not getting as much attention as the freezing of funding from USAid, may be one of the most significant attempts to actually preserve democracy given that the National Endowment for Democracy is a known CIA front, an arm of the CIA. It was created for that reason. And the whole point of this endowment for democracy is for us to spend money inside other countries to fund dissident groups against governments we dislike, to create turmoil and instability and try and foster coups as we did when Hillary Clinton funded anti-Putin opposition groups in Russia or when we used the National Endowment for Democracy through Victoria Nuland to engineer a coup in Ukraine and in so many other countries around the world. So much of what the United States does that it says is about advancing democracy is in fact about eroding it and attacking it.

But the same is true of Europe. And so to have J.D. Vance going there and saying, look at what you do, everything you do from censorship to interfering in other countries to proxy wars is done in the name of promoting democracy and yet the minute there's an election where the people vote in a way you dislike, you want to nullify the elections? The whole foundation of this US-EU relationship and the EU posture and self-branding of itself in the world is fraudulent for reasons that are so blatant and yet almost never expressed. It's incredibly encouraging to hear a senior US official go to Europe and tell them that to their faces. And they didn't take it well. The German defense minister and others gave speeches that were indignant about what J.D. Vance told them. Because essentially he was exposing the core propagandistic conceit of the West and the hypocrisy that has long defined it.

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