



Julian Assange Is Back — Here's What That Means

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Glenn Greenwald (GG): All right, it's from Trish Brown and she says this: "Glenn, we were all thrilled to learn from Julian Assange's X-post that he's back. Is there any chance that you will interview him? And what you see could be his role today post WikiLeaks, given what is happening in the world? Collateral Murder is now a daily occurrence with no consequence, it seems. Your thoughts?" All right, so I am as ardent of a supporter as Julian Assange as it gets. I've been, you know, revering WikiLeaks, the first time I wrote about them was 2007 or 2008 – I'll tell you that story in a second – and there were times when Julian publicly criticised me during the Snowden reporting, especially in ways that I thought were very unfair, but I don't care, like, you know, Norman Finkelstein has criticised me before too. I'm not going to criticise Norman Finkelstein sign back because it's just part of his personality. It's part of Julian's personality. And a lot of people have complained over the years about Julian's personality, like he can be very insulting, he can be unreasonable, he can have a temper. And a lot of people who supported WikiLeaks ended up retracting their support or walking away from WikiLeaks because of their dislike for Julian Assange personally. I never understood that. It's like Julian Assange created an organisation that pioneered mass digital leaks from major corporations and the most powerful governments on earth. And he used his hacking skills to pioneer a system that allowed people to do that anonymously. And then once he created that system, he went around the world publishing some of the most damaging leaks that angered the most powerful people in the world. And he did it without stopping until they destroyed him, literally imprisoned him, forced metaphorically imprisoned him in the Ecuadorian embassy, and then literally imprisoned in one of the UK's harshest prisons for years; ten years of his life he lost.

So, yes, Julian Assange is a difficult personality. You think that like somebody who goes and does all that, who goes and creates a system to facilitate the most damaging digital leaks, mass leaks from the most powerful institution in the world and then goes around publishing the CIA's document and the US military's document showing murder by an Apache helicopter of journalists and war crimes, do you think somebody like that is gonna be like an ordinary

guy? Like is real laid back, kind of like, hey, what's up? Like just an ordinary kind of balanced guy? You think he's gonna be ordinary, mediocre or banal? Again, a nice guy – no, that's not the person on the audio tape that's gonna do that.

And I'll say the same thing for Norman Finkelstein. Like Norman is very cantankerous. I've known him for years. I've always obviously supported him. I've defended him so often. And yet he'll have no problem right to my face, just like getting angry at me and telling me, whatever, making all kinds of like angry accusations, he'll do it in public too, as he's done over the past few months, but then I went on the Piers Morgan show with him, you know, and we were great together. I defended him a lot. And it's just like, why is that? Because Norman Finkelstein has done things that no person with a laid-back, happy-go-lucky personality would do. He was the son of Holocaust survivors, not like Holocaust survivors in this very like self-serving sense that a lot of people use it, like yeah, my parents were Jewish and they were around in 1943. So now I'm a Holocaust survivor, they're the children of Holocaust survivors. Norman Finkelstein's parents were in the Warsaw Ghetto and then they went to Auschwitz and a couple other camps. And he grew up with that. He grew up hearing from his mother and father, listening to them speak. He's obviously very close to his mother, talks about her a lot. So his childhood was formed by this very intense indoctrination, this intense narrative about absolute horrors. You know, he's hearing about camps and gas chambers and the like from his parents and from his whole community. And then he not only gets himself to start looking at that more analytically and objectively, but instead of just emotionally and through indoctrination, but actually becomes a dissident from the cause; at least as they see it. He sees it as continuing the cause, meaning he's against what was done to his parents, it is just not that Jews aren't the only victims of these kinds of things, Jews can be the perpetrators, like anybody else.

And in 2000, when nobody, there was very little space to talk about Israel, he wrote a book called *The Holocaust Industry* where he lambasted world Jewry and Jewish organisations in Israel for continuously profiteering off and exploiting the Holocaust. Not just for sympathy and for political power that comes with it, but for money. It's like we talk about reparations for Black people – Jews have gotten reparations like a hundred times on steroids from the Holocaust. And Norman wrote a book. Like, do you know how sacrosanct the Holocaust is, or at least was to like Jews? We're talking about 2000, so it's 25 years ago. Like the Holocaust now is kind of dead history, meaning people who went through it are mostly dead or talking about 85 years now. In 2000, huge numbers of people who went to camps who were still alive, it was only 55 years ago at that point, and he wrote a book exposing the Holocaust industry saying it's a fraud is just a way for Israelis and a lot of Jewish organisations to extort billions and billions of dollars out of people. Do you know what he had to go through in order to publish that book? And then all his scholarship over the years, he got his academic career destroyed by Alan Dershowitz. I mean, he was recommended for tenure by every committee at Ball University because he's a brilliant scholar. He really is. He works day and night on his scholarship. He's not just somebody who like pontificates. He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the issues that he talks about. And Alan Dershowitz basically went on a one-person jihad claiming he was anti-Semitic and got like Jewish donors at this university

and the top administrators to basically destroy Norman Finkelstein's career by rejecting him for tenure, even though every committee had approved him. And he just kept going, going, and going; 2008, 2010, 2012, he's on the fringe, not talking to anybody, but he just keeps going and going. And now he has the huge platform that he always deserved. But again, you don't go through all that. You don't stand up to all of that basically by yourself, unless you have a kind of confrontational and combative personality.

And so I don't care. I mean, Julian Assange has been extremely nice to me as well and so has Norman, but they've also been not nice. And that's true for everybody. And I just don't care. I like the value of that work, the courage it takes is a zillion times more important to me than whatever personality quirks they have that might be unpleasant. And so I've been an ardent supporter of Julian. It still makes me sick to my stomach when I think about what was done to him. I visited Julian with my late husband in 2018 in the Ecuadorian embassy, and I was horrified then by his conditions. And then I was talking to his wife Stella a lot and hearing from Julian as well. We've talked a lot over the years. And then when he went to Belmarsh prison, was called like Guantanamo, the British Guantanamo, because of its treatment, and their tendency to put the worst people, and there are terrorists and whatever, I just couldn't believe it. And he just sat there for, for years. And by the way, it was because the Trump administration indicted him. And then bullied Ecuador into pulling out his asylum.

And let me just quickly insert, last month, this is one of the things I travelled for last month in Sao Paulo, Brazil, the ten year president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa was in Sao Paulo, he has a show on RT in Spanish and in Portuguese, he invited me to be interviewed by him. I had other things I had to do that day anyway, and I'll always travel for Rafael Correa because I have a lot of respect for him, so I went, we talked, and we did this interview. It just came out this week. And Rafael Correa, President of this tiny little country in Ecuador, stood up to the United States and to the UK and then ultimately to Spain because Spain hated Julian Assange because he was advocating for the separatist movement of Basque separatists, while he was in the embassy and they were complaining to the UK that he was being allowed to do this. So it was three big countries, including the US badgering, threatening, bullying Ecuador for years to withdraw their asylum. And Rafael Correa took his middle finger up and said: "Asylum is a recognised sovereign right under every international law." And he protected Julian Assange. And the minute he was gone, even though his successor was supposed to be also a left-wing anti-imperialist, Lenin Moreno is his name – his parents named him Lenin – he completely capitulated, retracted the offer of asylum. That's when the London police were allowed to go into that embassy because Ecuador's government the minute Rafael Correa was gone let them do it. So Rafael Correa for me is a super impressive and admirable guy in terms of the heroism that he's shown.

So when I went last week to Chicago, I got there the day before because if you're flying in time zones and overnight, you need a day buffer zone for doing events, you can't get there the same day. And I get into my hotel room and I'm there for a little bit and I decide I'm going to go get something to eat because they don't have room service or anything. So I walk down and I walk out the door and the very first person I saw, bumped into the minute I walked out

is Julian Assange's brother Gabriel Shipton, who has been an incredible brother going around the world advocating for Julian for years. He was actually in Rio a few years ago. I interviewed him, had him in studio. So I know Gabriel, I really respect and like him and obviously I started asking like: "Hey, how's Julian doing? What's going on with Julian?" And we were talking about how I was saying how I'm actually glad that Julian disappeared from the public eye for a few years, which I don't think was easy to do because his work was what defined him. But after everything he's been through, basically ten years of confinement, not ever going outside once believing that he was going to die in prison, they tried to kill him in prison, I was like, I'm really glad he's just out of the spotlight. He's in Australia with his wife. He has, I believe, two kids with her, maybe three. He has another child from a previous relationship and these kids were growing up without him. So he needed to like create a family bond with his own kids. His wife is pregnant. They just announced that their new baby is on the way. Couldn't be happier for him. And we were both thinking like, yeah, it's good that he's just out of the spotlight, needs to recover. And then it was like hours later, hours later – I don't know if Gabriel knew, I don't think so – where Julian went on Twitter out of nowhere, no warning, I don't know of anybody who knew, I'm sure his wife knew, but beyond that, and this is what he posted. We could put that tweet up. This is from, I believe it was from Sydney, Australia. There he is, he just says, WikiLeaks first said: "He's back @Julian Assange", and then there's Julian standing in front of a mural of Julian Assang in downtown Sydney pointing at that, and he said: "I'm back".

And I've talked to Julian since. It was the best start of the event, which is about whistleblowers and to be able to not only have the first person I run into be Julian Assange's brother, but then also Julian comes back with a very kind of subtly defiant message, pointing at his own mural, obviously free, was totally exhilarating to me. And then his wife being pregnant, I talked to her after they announced that, I talked to him a few times. I don't think he really knows what his plans are. I think it's important to look at the human side of it, because what he went through is, they tried to kill him, basically. They did, they tried to kill him. Mike Pompeo, the first day that he was CIA director under Trump, gave a speech vowing to destroy WikiLeaks and everybody responsible for it and he may use the power of the CIA and the Justice Department to make good on that promise. When we talk about Julian being inn asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy, the Ecuadorian embassy is basically, because Ecuador is a small country, the embassy, you think of like a big grandiose building – which oftentimes it is, if it's a big country in a bigger country or an equal size country, that's important to it, if you look at the US embassy in Iraq, it takes up the entire, you know like basically a whole neighbourhood, it's a sprawling building – the Ecuadorian embassy in London is basically like a two bedroom apartment. You walk in, there's a little reception area, there's a conference room, and then there's like two small offices, one of which Julian turned into a bedroom where he lived. And he could not go outside of those walls. He did not have outdoor access. And the London police paid a huge amount of money to have police 24/7 in front of that building. So if he ever did try to leave, they would immediately arrest him. That was his life for seven years.

And I remember when he got asylum, like 2012, something like that, a lot of people were

saying: Oh, he's being so melodramatic. No one's after him. He doesn't need asylum. And Ecuador said: No, we believe that the US wants to get him. This was at a time when they got two women, both of whom had consensual sex with Julian Assange, and then they met and they compared notes. They each thought they were exclusively dating him. Turns out he was dating both. And they started claiming that even though the sex was consensual, he had sex with them without a condom. And under Swedish law, which has a very, very strong feminist movement and feminist block in the government, that constitutes rape. And that's how they were able to say, Julian Assange was accused of rape. They were trying, Sweden, wanted to get him to go back to Sweden. And he always said: "I will absolutely go back on the next plane, I want to confront these charges, if Sweden gives me a guarantee that they won't extradite me to the United States. That's my biggest worry." That's everybody's biggest worry ending up in the hands of the United States. And Sweden would not give him that promise, that guarantee. He said, If you give me that guarantee, and even Ecuador always said if Sweden gives a guarantee to Assange that he can go and face these charges on Swedish soil and they promise not to give him over to the United States if they ask for extradition, we, Ecuador, will withdraw our asylum because then he's no longer in danger and Sweden never would. And the reason is because Sweden's a tiny little vassal state of the United States. And of course the US was trying to get Assange. They were trying to lure him to Sweden to have him handed over. Because British courts created or in a lot of ways developed Anglo-Saxon law; that British judiciary has a lot of pride. They become more authoritarian, more deferential to the government, but it's not like British politicians who of course would do whatever the US says, the British judiciary actually ruled in Julian's favour on a few occasions. And the US didn't trust the British judiciary to ask them to extradite him. They knew though that Sweden would do whatever they wanted. So everyone said, Oh, Julian is crazy, Ecuador is crazy. Of course the US wanted him.

And so after seven years, once Correa is out of office, Mike Pompeo bullies the Ecuadorians to remove him the asylum, they go in and arrest him and then put him into Belmarsh for four years. Already he has mental and physical problems because he's been confined to a one-bedroom apartment in the middle of London for seven years but now he's in like a very harsh prison and just mentally you can't sustain that no matter how strong you are. It's gonna erode you mentally and physically and his doctors kept saying, his psychologists and doctors kept seeing, his health is suffering and he's declining dramatically. And I think they only let him out because they knew he was going to die. And they offered him a plea deal. He pled guilty to account of journalism, basically, and had his life free.

So I don't have a good sense for how much Julian wants to get back into the war. And if he doesn't for the rest of his life, I don't think anybody should utter a peep of criticism about that. He has more than paid his dues. If he never does a single thing for anybody for the rest of his life, he will deserve immense gratitude. But even if he doesn't, even if WikiLeaks doesn't return as like a very, you know, strong, credible presence for big leaks, it has created, WikiLeaks has, a new ethos where people want to leak information because WikiLeaks really did create the modern day whistleblower culture. And I talked about that in my speech. I kind of gave that history about why they were so crucial. I think Daniel Ellsberg was the first

modern day crucial whistleblower, but that was like pre-digital and, and it was very much of its generation. And then the new generation of whistleblowing was really created by Julian Assange and WikiLeaks spearheaded by them. And so I wouldn't bet on Julian coming back the way he was before. You know, even just as like an observer, like an analyst, a commentator, Julian is one of the most brilliant people I've ever met. And I don't, I really don't use that word, it's become like a synonym for smart. Like everyone's like, oh, he's brilliant, she's brilliant, they're brilliant. I use that word very, very sparingly because I think it means like somebody of very rare intelligence. Julian Assange is absolutely one of the most brilliant people I've ever met. And so even if it's just commenting or analysing or giving advice to other people on how to do things, whatever role he wants to assume is gonna be a super important role. He still has Julian Assange in him, despite however much he's been incapacitated and debilitated.

END

Thank you for reading this transcript. Please don't forget to donate to support our independent and non-profit journalism:

BANKKONTO:

Kontoinhaber: acTVism München e.V.
Bank: GLS Bank
IBAN: DE89430609678224073600
BIC: GENODEM1GLS

PAYPAL:

E-Mail:
PayPal@acTVism.org

PATREON:

<https://www.patreon.com/acTVism>

BETTERPLACE:

Link: [Click here](#)