



JULIAN ASSANGE IS A FREE MAN

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Julian Assange, that we wanted to tell you about – we're doing our best to analyse it as much as possible. The news just broke about a plea deal that Julian Assange has reached with the United States, under which he would agree to plead guilty to one felony charge. And in return, prosecutors will seek a 62 month sentence, which is the amount of time he already has spent in prison. So it would essentially allow him to be released from prison and return to Australia with no further constraints, immediately. And we're going to take a little bit of time just to analyse that. But do we want to do this ad first before we do that? All right, let's cover this right now given its importance. So I just got word of this. I'm gonna be looking at this with you, this CNN report, and we have been talking about the likelihood, or at least the hope and the possibility that this could happen for a lot of reasons, which I'll go over in a second. But I'm going to be reading this with you from CNN.

Julian Assange agrees to a plea deal with the Biden administration that would allow him to avoid imprisonment in the United States. Quote, "Wikileaks founder Julian Assange has agreed to plead guilty to a felony charge related to his alleged role in one of the largest US government breaches of classified material, as part of a deal with the Justice Department that will allow him to avoid imprisonment in the United States, according to newly filed federal court documents. Under the terms of the new agreement, the Justice Department prosecutors will seek a 62 month sentence, which is equal to the amount of time Assange has served in a high security prison in London while he fought extradition to the United States. The plea deal would credit that time served, allowing Assange to immediately return to Australia, his native country. The plea deal still must be approved by a federal judge. Assange has faced 18 counts from a 2019 indictment for his alleged role in the breach, that carried a maximum of up to 175 years in prison, though he was unlikely to be sentenced to that time in full. Assange is being pursued by U.S. authorities for publishing confidential military records supplied by former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning in 2010 and 2011. US officials allege that Assange goaded Manning into obtaining thousands of pages of unfiltered US diplomatic cables that potentially endangered confidential sources, Iraq war-related significant activity

reports and information related to Guantanamo detainees. President Joe Biden in recent months has alluded to a possible deal pushed by Australian government officials to return Assange to Australia. FBI and Justice Department officials have opposed any deal that didn't include a felony guilty plea by Assange, people briefed on the matter told CNN. Last month, a UK court ruled that Assange had the right to appeal his final challenge against extradition to the US, dealing a win to him and his years-long fight to avoid prosecution in the states for his alleged crimes.”

Okay, so... This is something that – and we're doing some reporting out now as we are on air as well about exactly what the release would look like and what dates it would be. But let me give you my impressions of this deal, which, as I said, I've talked about before, the possibility of something like this happening. So let's just go through a few points. First of all, on a personal level, Julian Assange has now spent almost 15 years in various forms of detention. When he faced accusations of sexual assault in Sweden, his position was, I'm willing to go to Sweden, get on the next plane to Stockholm, provided that Sweden doesn't use my presence, exploit my presence on Swedish soil to turn me over to the US. That was always his biggest fear was being turned over to the US and at the time, British pundits and American pundits mocked him for paranoia. And as it turned out, it was anything but paranoia. It was absolutely true. The US government did want to nab him and then get him to the United States, so that they can put him in a US dungeon for the rest of his life. And as a result, he sought asylum, which is a legal right recognised by every country in Ecuador and Ecuador granted it and even Ecuador said to Sweden: we'll lift the asylum if you agree that if he comes to Sweden to answer or to be interrogated about these sexual assault allegations filed by two women – and their allegation was that they had consensual sex with Julian Assange, but that during the sex he didn't wear a condom and they had not consented to him not wearing a condom. And that was a form of rape or sexual assault under Swedish law. The position of Ecuador was: we'll lift our asylum and he'll go to Sweden the next day. And the Swedish government said no. Even though they had the full power, we will not give you that guarantee. And as a result, Ecuador gave him asylum and he stayed inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London from 2010 to 2018. And I know that may sound like some grand place, but I visited Julian there, and it was basically a tiny little two bedroom apartment in a high rise building in the middle of London that had no outdoor space, had no place to go and absorb sun. It had windows, but that was about it. He was spied on. He was detained in this tiny little space that he could not leave. The British had 24 hour police surrounding the building, so that if he took one step out of that embassy, he would be immediately arrested. So he was detained from 2010 to 2018 without having been convicted of any crime. And then the Trump administration under Mike Pompeo succeeded in coercing Ecuador through a combination of threats and bribes, promises of benefits, to lift that asylum, which Ecuador then did in 2018. And that allowed the British police to go in and arrest Assange. And they put him in a high security prison in London. Belmarsh prison, which has terrorist suspects and the worst criminals there is. The BBC calls Belmarsh the British Guantanamo. And that's where he has been for the last six years, almost now.

So you have eight years of detention, effective imprisonment inside the Ecuadorian embassy. Another five plus years in a high security, maximum security prison inside the UK. And the only crime of which Julian Assange was ever convicted during those 14 years of captivity was a charge of bail jumping – a misdemeanour charge that he was convicted once the British police arrested him. And the charge was: when you didn't show up for your court date back in 2010 and instead sought asylum with Ecuador, you were guilty of bail jumping and therefore we're going to convict you of that. And his prison sentence was 51 months, which was the maximum under British law. It's a misdemeanour. So it couldn't be here. He's obviously served that sentence long ago. He served it as of 2019. And then right when he was about to get out, that was when the Trump administration, under the Trump Justice Department, indicted Assange and then argued to a British court that he had to remain in prison while the extradition process unfolded because Assange had already proved that he was a flight risk if you let him out on bail. And the British court agreed and said you have to remain in prison until this extradition process is resolved and the extradition process is now taking six years, and it's not really all that close to the end. And there have been Assange's doctors and psychiatrists who have warned that both his mental and physical health were in extreme danger through this 15 year detention. And on a personal level – I'm of course disappointed that he pled guilty to a felony count. Because I believe vehemently that he's guilty of nothing, and that if anything, he is owed a lot of compensation for unjust imprisonment. That was why they want a 62 month sentence, so that he can't claim that even one day in prison was unjust. But on a personal level, he's married, he has two children who are now growing – I think they're seven and eight. And the ordeal that he has been subjected to over the last 15 years is almost impossible to express. So whatever Julian felt like he should do and his family felt like they should do to get him out of prison and finally end this nightmare and make him be free, I totally support that.

I have a few points to make about the Assange thing. The reason why I've been saying that this doesn't surprise me is because I never believed that the Biden administration actually wanted to bring Julian Assange on American soil to stand trial. Imagine the spectacle that that would have created as Biden heads into an election. Imagine the risks to the US government of allowing Julian Assange to go on the stand and speak about the things that he believes he has discovered and wants to say. And it would put on Joe Biden's record that he would be the first American president in history to preside over the imprisonment, not of a source who leaked information, but of someone who published classified information, which every newspaper in the United States does on a regular basis. The goal of putting and keeping Julian Assange in prison was to crush Julian Assange physically and mentally, and they've succeeded in doing that. And they no longer care. They never cared if he came and stood trial in the United States. They wanted to break Assange and simultaneously send a message to any other future Assange's that we will ruin your life if you publish our secrets. The same reason why they won't let Edward Snowden come back to the United States, why they want to put him in prison for the rest of his life as well. It is a deterrent message to keep their ability to hide their own crimes through secrecy, immune from the one vulnerability that they have, which is that brave people inside the government leaked that information to the public or through the media, and reveal what it is that they're doing.

And then finally there is a lot of pressure in Australia, which, remember, is the only country that he has ever been a citizen of. He is not a citizen of the United States. He barely has stepped foot inside the United States in his life. He was here for three days. And the Australian citizenry started to get very angry at the subservience of the Australian government, saying, how is it possible that you are not standing up the United States and demanding the release of our citizen? And coming back to Australia. And so the Australian government, pressured by that growing citizen anger, has been insisting that the Biden administration agree to Assange's release and that would let him go back to Australia. And so I've been hoping for and even speculating about the arrival of a deal of this kind. We have an update on it as well – let me just, see what this is. It's actually a detail from the Wikileaks account about exactly when Assange's release date would be. We're gonna have that up for you in just a second. This deal, by the way, it still has to be approved by the federal judge who's presiding over this case. But given that these federal judges in Northern Virginia and Eastern Virginia are completely subservient to the US government, my guess is they'll rubber stamp whatever US prosecutors want. Maybe instead of waiting this long to get the tweet up on the screen, you can tell me what it says.

Okay, so here's the update, and we're just doing this because it's all happening live as we're on the air. None of this happened until we went on the air. This is from the official Wikileaks account, and it says the following: “Julian Assange is free. Julian Assange is free. He left Belmarsh maximum security prison on the morning of June 24th, after having spent 1901 days there. He was granted bail by the High Court in London and was released at Stansted Airport during the afternoon, where he boarded a plane and departed the UK. This is the result of a global campaign that spanned grassroots organisers, press freedom campaigners, legislators and leaders from across the political spectrum all the way to the UN. This created the space for a long period of negotiation with the US Department of Justice, leading to a deal that has not yet been formally finalised. We will provide more information as soon as possible. After more than five years in a two by three metre cell, isolated 23 hours a day, he will soon reunite with his wife, Stella Assange, and their children, who have only known their father from behind bars. Wikileaks published groundbreaking stories of government corruption and human rights abuses, holding the government accountable for their action. As Editor-in-chief Julian paid severely for these principles and for the people's right to know. As he returns to Australia, we thank all those who stood by us, fought for us and remained utterly committed in the fight for his freedom. Julian's freedom is our freedom.”

So that makes the story even better that although a federal judge still needs to rubber stamp this deal, obviously there was a lot of coordination between the US, British and Australian governments whereby the prosecutors conveyed their willingness to enter this deal once Julian agreed to it, even though it has to be approved by the judge. The British court was willing to let him out on bail, and he is now out of the UK that has served as the place of his detention for the last 14 years. He's back with his wife and kids. Although the Wikileaks account doesn't say and I understand the reasons, presumably he is headed to Australia, which is the country of which he is a citizen, and he will hopefully be able to find as many

days as possible, a piece of happiness with his family. And if he wants, return to the work that he did. But what they say there is exactly right. There are a few people who have paid a higher price than Julian Assange for their extremely brave and courageous commitment to providing to the public. What we have the right to know, which is transparency about what our own government is doing in the dark. And Julian was a pioneer and a prophet because he was the first person to see that the digital age meant that the main vulnerability of the US government was leaks by large digital leaks, and that he created the system using his knowledge as a hacker to enable sources to bring those leaks to the public and stay anonymous and protected. And obviously, we'll talk a lot more about this, but just as a personal friend of Julians and also somebody who has been championing the cause of Wikileaks and Assange for a long, long time – I've been hoping this day would come for a long time. I'm thrilled for him and his family that it is here. But as the Wikileaks account says, it's not just Julian's freedom, but the freedom of everybody who believes in the cause of a free press, of free speech, of standing up to the US security state and security states around the globe and bringing transparency to citizenry and populations about the dark and criminal acts of their own government. I'm sure we'll have more on this tomorrow and throughout the week, but that is my reaction for now.

All right, so before we sign off, we have one more thing on the Julian Assange story that we want to show you. And obviously, I'm going to be able to cover it in a much more systematic way tomorrow. The news of it just broke. I had heard some whispers over the last week, but nothing definitive, nothing I could report. For those of you who didn't hear it, there's a plea agreement that Julian Assange reached with the US government that allowed him to plead guilty to one count, and serve a sentence that is 64 months, which is the amount of time he's already served in prison. And he left not only that prison today on bail, but then left the UK to fly home to Australia. He is completely free of these charges. And we have a video, I believe – and it's really a beautiful thing to watch, just from a human perspective – of Julian leaving the prison and then it's a tweet from his wife Stella Assange: “Julian is free. Words cannot express our immense gratitude to you. Yes, you, who have all mobilised for years and years to make this come true. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Follow @Wikileaks for more info soon.” And then here is the video that she attached. And I believe this is of Julian leaving the prison for the airport in a car and then arriving. There you see him, I think signing the documents he needs to sign. And then there he is, walking on to the plane that will permit him finally, after almost 15 years of unbelievably oppressive and unjust detention, to be a free man to leave the UK, presumably to go back to his home country of Australia. So that's a pretty uplifting and emotional thing to watch. Notwithstanding the fact that it was preceded by 15 years of absolute evil in trying to break Julian Assange in every single way for nothing more than the crime of doing real journalism.

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