



Journalist Richard Medhurst Interview On His UK Arrest Under Terrorism Act

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Richard Medhurst has become quite a popular independent journalist. He has a YouTube show where he's been working year after year building an audience because he offers not just a scathing critique of orthodoxies of Western foreign policy, but an extremely informed critique. I can't imagine finding very many people who will be more enlightening about things like Western imperialism in Africa, or the war in Ukraine, or the war in Israel, or the Western role in all of that. He covered the Assange case extensively. Basically, he's doing what independent media is meant to do, which is offering perspectives in a very informed way that you can't get in very many other places. And at the same time, doing so in a way that is steeped not in rhetoric or blowhard behaviour, but just in very studied facts. And it's one of the things that has made his show so popular, not just among a large group of people who watch him, but also among myself. We've had him on our show before and we are happy to have him back, although not necessarily under great circumstances. Richard, it's great to see you, even though it's not under great circumstances. Thanks for taking the time.

Richard Medhurst (RM): Hi, Glenn, thanks so much for having me. And your words are very much appreciated.

GG: Yeah, they're very genuine, so. All right, let's get to it. We talked a little bit about at the beginning of the show, but for people who didn't hear, on Thursday last week, you flew to the UK and you were met by six police officers at the plane – so before you could even get off the plane and you get to immigration – and they essentially placed you under arrest, under physical custody of the UK police, under a terrorism law of 2000, though they didn't really explain why. But you did about a nine minute video going into great detail about the treatment to which you were subjected, which we will link to so that people can go watch the full story of that. But in lieu of that, can you tell me what it is during this arrest that lasted 24 hours, that you were able to learn about why it is that you are being arrested?

RM: Well, just from the get go. I just want to say that, I'm out on bail effectively. So, you know, I'm not at liberty to divulge exactly what they asked me. And go too much into detail...

GG: But let me just ask you, are you out on bail with restrictions? Have you had to surrender your passport or are you able to leave the country?

RM: Yeah. So here's the thing. I was released on unconditional bail. I was given my passport back. The thing is, I do have to go back in three months and surrender myself to the police station. Although I don't feel that the bail really is unconditional because, you know, essentially everything and anything I say, anything I do, it can be used against me. I think what they wanted to achieve is to silence me as a journalist and stop me doing my work. So they say it's unconditional, but it's not really unconditional, is it?

GG: As people know, and I talked about this a little bit, as you of course know, I'm very familiar with this terrorism law, the terrorism of 2000 law, because my husband was notoriously detained under it when coming back to Rio through London, after having spent time with my reporting colleague Laura Poitras, and they were threatening him the whole time to put him under arrest as well. I think the only reason they didn't is because the Brazilian government was so aggressive in demanding his release, but it was an act of great intimidation. And he ended up suing and obtained a ruling that the provision under which he was detained, which is section five as I recall, was unconstitutional when applied to journalists. The section under which I understand you were charged is a different section, which is section 12. And reading that, it seems to me like it's intended to criminalise opinions, specifically opinion or reporting that is deemed to advance the agenda of a group that's designated as a terrorist organisation by the UK. Is that a correct understanding of the law under which you were detained? Do you have any details about what they said you did that you can share with us that constitutes a violation in their eyes of that law?

RM: Well, to be honest, I thought that they had nicked me under schedule seven.

GG: That's what I mean. Schedule seven, it's been a while. Exactly.

RM: Yeah, I thought it was schedule seven because that's when they make you answer every question. You have to hand over the passwords for your devices on the spot. And then, "at least", if I can put it in quotation marks, you get to leave afterwards. Right? You're not actually arrested. And that didn't really dawn on me until, quite a bit that, you know, I wasn't being detained. I was actually being arrested, like unbelievable. And it wasn't schedule seven. It was section 12. And so, I mean, I'd never heard of it. And even though I was quite critical of the Terrorism Act because in general, now, I'm not speaking just about section 12, I'm speaking in general, the whole point of it is that the threshold for any of the offences that they put in there are so low that journalists, and that's who the target audience usually, you know, the targets usually are can just be picked up and detained and arrested. And don't get me wrong, there are some parts of the Terrorism Act that are actually made for fighting terrorism, which are needed in any country. But the problem is that when you use this against journalists instead of actual terrorists, it becomes a political tool. I think we can all agree on that. And

the threshold with this thing, the way that they explained it to me, and from what I gathered, is that it is really so, so, so utterly low, that anything can be considered criminal. It can be skewed, it can be twisted into an offence of the highest order. Because we should remember that, I wasn't nicked for burglary or something. They took me off a plane for terrorism. I mean, I still can't even believe it. You know, it's insane, really!

GG: I was thinking about other cases like this. And in the US there's a statute called the Material Support for Terrorism Statute. Where, and as you said, there are obviously valid functions of this law. You cannot, for example, send arms or send money to groups that are designated terrorist organisations, al-Qaida, ISIS, Hezbollah, Hamas. You can bicker about whether some of those groups should be on the list. Of course, the US used to have the African National Congress on the list for the crime of fighting the apartheid regime that the US supported. But there is a list of designated terrorist organisations, and you can understand why the government would say that being a crime to say, helping them get grenades or other kinds of sophisticated weaponry or paying for it, knowing that you're doing so, because then you're deliberately strengthening a terrorist organisation. At the height of the kind of insanity of the War on Terror, though there were these prosecutions, I'm not exaggerating, where people would be arrested for material support for terrorism, for the things they were saying that often were just critiques of US foreign policy. So they would upload a video to YouTube where they would kind of show US bombing of the region, they would show US support for dictators, and of course, these are part of the grievances of a lot of groups that are designated terrorist organisations, but it's also a critique that a lot of people who are not terrorists make. And the free speech implications of this were so severe and so obvious, because it means that you can become guilty of material support for terrorism by expressing criticism of US foreign policy on the grounds that that helps promote the interest of terrorist groups in that region. Is your understanding of the UK law and what you have been charged with similar to that sort of a framework?

RM: Well, let me just put it this way. You're heading in the right direction. Once again, I'm not 100% at liberty to speak, nor am I a lawyer, but what you just described does sound eerily similar. So, it doesn't matter if you support it or you don't, your opinion as a journalist or as a human being is apparently not taken into account. It's just like, you know, you're criticising your government's foreign policy, and if they don't like it, they can turn it into something entirely different. So that's why I feel like they're putting words in my mouth. I feel like in a sense that it's a political persecution because I was doing a lot of reporting recently, for example, on this gangrape that Israeli soldiers were carrying out. I did a lot of research on the Israeli Olympic team because they were putting out pro genocide or like pro war statements on their social media. And as you'll recall, Glenn, all the Russian and Belarusian athletes were banned over the war in Ukraine, for things that, you know, were mild in comparison. Things they didn't even say or do, whereas Israeli athletes were getting away with crazy things. And so I think this was someone's way, I don't know who, and I'm not necessarily saying that some foreign power was involved, maybe foreign interests, I don't know, but I thought it was like, okay, you want to go through the social media of all these people? Well, we'll go through yours. And I don't know, I just feel like they're trying to stop me from doing

my job, and they're just taking things and turning them into a completely different meaning. And it sounds similar to what you just described.

GG: Yeah. So I just want to make clear, when I'm asking questions, I don't want to cajole or pressure you in any way to say things that you shouldn't say in the interest of this pending criminal charge, which I think you are taking seriously. And I don't blame you for doing so. I'm obviously interested in the case, in part because of the effect that this law had on my family, and I remember very well like it was yesterday, how sort of traumatising it is to have that word be attached to what you're doing: terrorism. That is not a joke of a word, especially in the context of the US and the UK. But I'm interested in it because we've been covering very extensively this kind of increasingly and rapidly growing assault, aggressive assault on free speech in the EU generally, but in the UK specifically – saw a lot of that with the riots and the like and some of the bizarre threats that issued from the UK. So I want to just get a sense for you; have you been told specifically and I'm not saying please tell us if you can't, but have you been given pretty clear notice about what you're alleged to have done that violates this law?

RM: Well, again, I'm not sure if I'm at liberty to say, but the thing is that when I was arrested, I was basically asking him, like, when can we get to what is it that you want to ask me? Because I was, of course, worried and curious and genuinely just like saying I'm not going to stand in your way or be uncooperative or give you any reason to stop framing me in a bad way. Like, let's just get on with it. And they just wouldn't tell me initially, right? It was so vague and abstract. They were just citing some part of the law. And I was trying to find out and no one would tell me. And then they said, you'll find out later. And so, you know, I was sitting in the jail cell and I'm just like, I'm going through my head like, what did I possibly do or say that could qualify for anything that they are about to say?! And that's the thing. And I was also thinking at the same time, it doesn't matter because the threshold is so low that, no matter how innocent may be, or no matter how well intentioned, apparently they – so I'm not saying that I actually did anything wrong, I'm on the contrary – I'm saying that, they can just twist anything, anything they want and make it sound something completely evil and frame you as if you're a monster. So I waited about 15, I don't know, 13, 14, 15 hours until I was finally interviewed. And then the interview took about an hour. An hour and a half, something like that. And they played some things and read some things to me and that's how it went, essentially. So I was just shocked that this word terrorism was being used to describe what I was doing because they knew I'm a journalist. I actually had all my journalists press cards with me in the bag. If you're going to arrest someone for something as big as terrorism, obviously you have some kind of an idea of who they are and what their profile is. And I find this just so, so, so exaggerated. It's really gross. And also when you were talking about what happened to David, I mean, I was actually thinking of him while I was in jail. Because that was the prime example of how the terrorism was being used unfairly against people. I always, always, always remember that. And I was thinking, I don't know if it's the same schedule or the same section. I don't know what's going on exactly. Like I said, they wouldn't tell me for most of the time. But I felt like whatever they were going to tell me I knew was going to be taken out of context, blown out of proportion. And if I can just maybe talk about actual

terrorism, when my parents were working in the UN we were posted in Pakistan, in Islamabad and I was in the British school and you had the Egyptian embassy right next to my school, it was adjacent, so I was there when there was a double bombing. That's terrorism. Okay?! Not journalism. I know I shouldn't have to say this and explain this, but the irony behind all this is that if you go and look back at who is funding al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden, you'll find it's the British government and it's the CIA.

GG: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, they drop weapons all the time into the Middle East that are used by extremists. They're a big funder of arms to Saudi Arabia. So that's just a whole separate issue. Like I said, I hope that ruling helps that David was able to obtain that said, journalism cannot be terrorism. But one of the things you had mentioned in the video was that they had seized all of your equipment, including your drives, your cameras, your communication devices that obviously might involve communications with sources. Have they given that back to you? And did they compel you to give passwords to those devices so that they could access them?

RM: Yeah. So I just want to be clear. I don't want people to think like this is any less serious than schedule seven. If anything, it's actually worse. And I was compelled to hand over the passwords. I refused and under this specific section, under section 12, they can't make you give them on the spot. But, again, this is still being hashed out, so I don't know where it's going. As you correctly point out, they took all of my journalistic equipment. I still can't even function properly right now because I have no way of reaching people. So, they took my phone, they took a simple wired microphone, that has nothing to do with the phone. They took some wireless microphones, like Rode microphones or something. They took my headphones also, some wireless headphones for listening to music. And I even protested. I told them, what do you need to put all this inside of the bag? And then they gave me some excuse like, yeah, actually it shouldn't be in there, but the bag is sealed now and we can't do anything. They think I'm stupid. I know how the police speak in England and I know, I know exactly what they're trying to do. They're basically telling me in their own way, like, no, we actually don't trust you and there's nothing that you can do about it and we're going to take it. So they took everything. And they really dehumanised me. I feel like this is another important aspect that should be mentioned is that there was no need – first of all the whole concept of calling a journalist a terrorist is absurd. But then not only to detain them, which is bad enough, but to arrest them and then on top of that make them eat food with a piece of cardboard... I don't know if you wanted to go into detail about that, but I can offer more than enough. And I really felt it was designed to dehumanise and intimidate you. It's meant to leave a chilling effect on you. And then people who are of course among your readership and viewership so that they think that, wow, if the threshold is so low, I better be quiet as well.

GG: It's an absolute display of power with the intention of showing you what they can do to you without any real limits whenever they want, for any real reason, simply because you have become a voice that in some way they find to be an impediment to their goals. That's what's so pernicious about it. Just a couple logistical questions. I know you've lived elsewhere in the

EU before. Are you currently living in the UK? Are you a citizen of the UK? And do you have good legal counsel for this process?

RM: I'm not living in the UK, but I am a British citizen. I was born in Damascus. My parents were working in the UN, at that time in peacekeeping. But I'm British by blood, so to speak. My father got English citizenship. So basically I think what makes them angry is that I'm English, and I was supposed to become part of the whole foreign diplomatic service, because, I mean, my parents didn't work for any government, but they were diplomats. And the whole plan was that, okay, I would learn all these languages and then go and maybe become a diplomat or an ambassador. And I did put all those skills to use, but I'm not using them to further what is the current British foreign policy. So I think they just don't just see me as a journalist that they don't like, they see me as someone who is sort of a class traitor, if that makes sense.

GG: Absolutely. So go ahead. Sorry.

RM: Yeah. And I'm not living in the UK currently. So I think that was one of their considerations as well. We basically moved all over the world because of my parents' work. It wasn't even in my hands.

GG: So there are people in the chat as I'm not at all surprised, who are asking how they can donate or how they can help you. Because obviously people regard this as a pretty severe attack on basic press freedoms. And there are a lot of people who are fans of your work as well, and want to get you back up and running as soon as possible. So for those people who do want to support you and kind of help in fighting back against what's been done to you, what are the best ways for them to do that?

RM: That's very kind of you, Glenn and very kind of everybody in the chat. I mean, basically, I'm on Patreon, so it would be patreon.com/richardmedhurst and also on PayPal, although I don't know the link. But if they go on Patreon or on YouTube, so youtube.com/richardmedhurst, they will find everything. And sorry, I forgot to answer the last bit of your question. Yes, I have good legal counsel. I have some of the best, and I'm very grateful to them.

GG: Excellent. Because it's not only important to you and to people who are followers of yours, but it's also an important precedent to be able to defeat this sort of thing for ways that they might want to do it in the future. Richie, I'm sorry that has happened to you. We obviously intend to cover whatever it is that continues to happen. If there's anything we can do for you, please don't hesitate to let us know, including putting you back on our show. As you know, we are fans of your work, we want to see you back up and running as soon as possible and do everything possible to combat this unjust assertion of police action, which to me at least, seems very clearly designed to punish your journalism and punish your free speech. So I really appreciate you taking the time to come on. I'm sure it's kind of a stressful and busy time for you. So, thanks a lot and we'll see you shortly.

RM: Thanks so much Glenn, really appreciate it.

GG: Alright, have a great evening.

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