



Telegram Founder & CEO Pavel Durov Arrested in France as Online Censorship Escalates

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): All right. So probably some of you have heard the news over the weekend that the French government has detained under what were at first very unknown circumstances, the billionaire founder and Russian national Pavel Durov, as a result of what clearly appeared to be the French government's anger, that telegram often ignores censorship orders that emanate from various governments. And as a result, Durov has made himself an enemy of many powerful governments around the world. In fact, when Durov, who is Russian born and is a Russian citizen, first began to think about how to found social media platforms, he founded what was known as Russian Facebook, and it became a massively popular social media platform in Russia. They became very wealthy as a result of founding that. And when the Russian government began demanding that that platform turn over information about citizens, especially citizens who are using that app and that social media platform in order to try and stir unrest in Ukraine, and trying to foster regime change in Ukraine, to make that government that was elected less pro-Russian and more pro-Europe, as the rebels in Ukraine, backed by the West, ended up being able to do, Telegram refused, and they basically had to flee Russia as a result. And then it was thereafter, in fact, once the Snowden reporting began, just a few months later, when they founded, these brothers, the Durov brothers, founded this second app, which is Telegram, that was designed based on the promise to have very sophisticated encryption that makes it very, very difficult for governments around the world to be able to spy on or shut down or trace who it is that's communicating online. And obviously this has become a very important ability in places like India or China or Russia or all sorts of places where all kinds of censorship can take place. But it's also increasingly important to citizens of Western Europe, and the United States. And so there is nothing, basically nothing that governments feel threatened by and hate more than executives of social media platforms who permit free speech on the internet. As we've been reporting on, probably more than anything else, the attempt to shut down online free speech, in my view, is the single greatest goal of the EU, the UK, of Canada, of countries around the democratic world, and of course, the United States as well. And that was why it was so predictable that as soon as Elon Musk bought Twitter, based on the promise that he hasn't

always completely fulfilled, but certainly has taken major steps toward fulfilling, to turn that into a free speech platform, that the attacks on Elon Musk from every single conceivable direction would begin exploding. And that's exactly what happened. Attacks on his character, legal attacks on his various companies, all sorts of investigations, and now a formal criminal investigation by the EU based on claims that he is permitting too much disinformation to disseminate online. So you can see that attack on X and on Musk. You can certainly see it on this platform where France has basically already made it impossible for Rumble to have access to its market by demanding that Rumble remove Russian state media outlets like RT and Sputnik and Rumble's position is we're not going to take orders from the French government about who's allowed on our site and who is it. And so the French said, we're going to make you unavailable at the IP level. And if you are in France and you try and watch Rumble, like if you try and watch it in Brazil, as a result of Rumble's refusal to deal with those censorships are just not available in those countries. It shows how intense and how angry and how serious governments around the world are taking the threat that they see from unfettered free speech because they saw what happened in 2016, when Americans defied elite decrees and elected Donald Trump instead of Hillary Clinton. They saw it when the British ratified Brexit, instead of doing what they're told and staying in the EU, they've seen it with the rise of populist parties all over the democratic world and this frightens pro-establishment sectors. And they're trying to kill the main weapon that's being used against establishment power, which is a free internet. And people like Pavel Durov, who would enable the internet and sectors of the internet to remain free, have become public enemy number one.

Now, earlier today, the prosecutor of the French Republic issued a document that made quite clear exactly what the theories are behind Pavol Durov's arrest. It was speculated over the weekend that it was because of French anger at his refusal and Telegram's refusal to turn over user information and to censor on command. And basically, the French prosecutor with this document confirmed that today. We're going to put it on the screen. And I think it's very important to note here that even this document doesn't explicitly say that it's about Pavel Durov, but it's very obvious that this is who the document is referring to. And they're essentially saying we detained this foreign national. And here's the reasons why, here are the crimes that we suspect him of having committed. And if we put that on the screen, you can essentially see that the document says that the judicial investigation – actually it does say "Pavel Durov, founder and CEO of the instant messaging and platform Telegram was arrested at Le Bourget airport in the outskirts of Paris on Saturday, the 24th of August 2024, and taken into police custody at 8 p.m.. This measure comes in the context of a judicial investigation opened on the 8th of July, 2024, following a preliminary inquiry initiated by Section J3", which is an organ of the French government designed to fight against cybercrime at the Paris prosecutor's office. And the judicial investigation was opened, according to this document on charges of – and there you see seven or eight different crimes that begin with the word complicity. Things like complicity with webmastering on an online platform in order to enable illegal transactions in organised group. Complicity in possessing pornographic images of minors. Distributing, offering or making available pornographic images. Acquiring, transporting, possessing, offering or selling of narcotic substances. Complicity in offering, selling or making available equipment, tools, programs or data designed to be adapted to get

access and to damage the operations of an automated data processing system. Organised fraud. But when you sort of put it on the legalisms, the theory of this criminal prosecution is that not just the company itself, but the executives of the company can become criminally liable, put in prison. Not as a result of anything they're accused of doing. They're not accused of engaging in any of those crimes, of possessing child pornography, or enabling the transport or sale of unauthorised technology. They're accused of simply providing a service where people can speak freely and privately, and of not acting on the demands of the government, and therefore they're threatening to, or they have already put this Russian born billionaire into prison for the crime of offering a free speech platform, creating legal theories where executives of these companies can be criminally prosecuted. You could very easily see that happening to the CEO of Rumble, who also continues to refuse to obey censorship orders from various governments and courts that are deemed unjust by them, as well as Elon Musk, who, as I said, is now the target of multiple investigations around the world. In fact, he is already the subject of a criminal investigation in Brazil as a result of that Supreme Court justice that Elon Musk has been attacking and denouncing, Alexandre de Moraes, we've reported on many times who has become incredibly tyrannical. And he has now included acts and Elon Musk as a target of a criminal investigation. So you can see this menacing attempt, this increasingly threatening attempt to threaten not the companies, but the executives of the company with criminal prosecution and prison if they continue to provide any sort of platform that allows free speech and anonymity of conduct and speech online. And I don't think it takes much to illustrate why that's so dangerous.

Now, the danger that this illustrates can be seen in part by people who are celebrating what it means and how it might be used. So here is Alexander Vindman, who gained sort of fame or notoriety during the first Trump impeachment hearing when he depicted himself as some sort of brave whistleblower against Donald Trump. And he has now become a hardcore, fanatical advocate of establishment dogma, the war in Ukraine, he's obsessed with that. And he basically is just kind of a standard liberal. And much of what he says, though more fanatical, illustrates the underlying mindset. And here's what he said in celebrating the arrest of Pavel Durov today. Quote, "While Durov holds French citizenship, he is arrested for violating French law. This has broader implications for other social media, including Twitter. There's a growing intolerance for platform disinformation and malign influence, and a growing appetite for accountability. Musk should be nervous." So he is interpreting that and celebrating that as exactly what it is, which is an obvious, very clear threat to social media companies around the world, to the billionaires who have found them, to the people who run them, that if you want to have free movement on planet Earth, if you want to be able to live freely, you have two choices. You can start taking censorship orders from governments and turning over whatever user data they want about your users so they can find who it is, who's saying whatever people are saying online, or you will face prosecution around the world, not just in tiny little countries, but in major countries like France. Obviously, Pavel Durov assumed he would be safe travelling to a Western European country, and he found out when he got there that that was obviously untrue. Now, Manuel Macron, the president of France, responded to a lot of different denunciations of this incident, including by Elon Musk and others, by issuing this statement earlier today. He said, quote, "I have seen false information regarding France

following the arrest of Pavel Durov. France is deeply committed to freedom of expression and communication, to innovation, and to the spirit of entrepreneurship. And it will remain so. In a state governed by the rule of law, freedoms are upheld within a legal framework, both on social media and in real life, to protect citizens and respect their fundamental rights. It is up to the judiciary and its full independence to enforce the law. The arrest of the President of Telegram on French soil took place as part of an ongoing judicial investigation. It is no way a political decision. It is up to the judges to rule on the matter." Now, this all sounds very familiar to me because every single time the Brazilian Supreme Court does something authoritarian, every time it imprisons somebody for criticising the court, and the theory is created that they're somehow undermining Brazilian democracy by criticising or questioning particular judges or policies of the Brazilian government, every time somebody is banned off the internet by order of a judge, this is what the Brazilian government says: Oh we're a country of laws. And when judges issue these rulings, that's for the judiciary to act independently. And we're just going to honour those rulings and enforce them. We're not going to question them. And what that means is that as long as you have a judiciary filled with people who also agree that internet freedom is an extremely dangerous threat to establishment order, to the ruling class, which it is – in fact, I would argue it's by far the greatest threat, a free internet. It's why Edward Snowden unravelled his life and risked his freedom in order to defend it. It's why Julian Assange did the same thing. It's why it has become the primary cause of my work as well. It's because the internet is the single most powerful tool that human beings have, in fact, the only real, powerful tool that human beings have to communicate freely with one another, to organise freely, to act with privacy, or in some semblance of whatever remains of privacy online, and once that's gone, that's the only remaining source of speech in the flow of information that establishment sectors don't fully control yet. They're trying to fully control it. They're close to fully controlling it, but they don't control it fully yet. Because of the pockets of free speech that continue to exist on the internet, and people who are responsible for those pockets of free speech have become public enemy number one of these governments for exactly that reason. Because their goal is to put a stranglehold on the internet so that the only things you can say on the internet and do on the internet are things that aggrandise the interest of state leaders. And so, of course, Emmanuel Macron is going to say, oh, this isn't political, this is just a standard crime. We have laws not just in real life but also online, and people aren't allowed to commit crimes online. But nobody is saying that the founder of Telegram committed crimes himself. What they're saying is that he permitted other people to commit crimes because his platform is a free one. It would be like if tomorrow the FBI went and arrested the CEO and top shareholders of AT&T. And then people said, well, why have you arrested the CEO and the top shareholders of AT&T? And the argument was, well, because a judge issued an arrest warrant because people have been committing crimes, planning crimes on the telephone, and AT&T has allowed them to continue to do so freely. They haven't listened on the calls. They haven't shut down those calls. They could then be theoretically complicit in all of these crimes, based on the theory that the French government is now trying to implement. This is what makes this so dangerous. And the fact that Emmanuel Macron is saying, oh, these are just judges doing it, these judges are so often in cahoots with. I mean, who do you think appoints these judges? Who do you think chooses them? From what precincts of society are they emerging? They're

all guardians of establishment power. And of course, they're going to use their judicial power, just like they'll use their state power, their executive power, their legislative power. These states will just shut down the internet and any remnants of free speech on it. And that's exactly what happened. And the fact that we're hiding behind a judge when doing so doesn't make it any less lawless or menacing.

Now here's the CEO of Rumble, Chris Pavlovski, who happened to be in France, in Europe when the arrest was announced, when the report came of Pavel Durov being arrested immediately upon landing just outside that airport in Paris. And Chris Pavlovski, the CEO of this platform, yesterday said, quote, "I'm a little late to this, but for good reason. I've just safely departed from Europe. France has threatened Rumble, and now they have crossed a red line by arresting Telegram's CEO Pavel Durov, reportedly for not censoring speech. Rumble will not stand for this behaviour, and we will use every legal means available to fight for freedom of expression, a universal human right. We are currently fighting in the courts of France and we hope for Pavel Durov's immediate release". I find that sentence both shocking and unbelievable, but also completely reasonable, which is "I've just safely departed from Europe". Why would the CEO of a social media platform who has not broken the law, feel like he couldn't speak out until he, quote, "safely departed from Europe". Think about the fear that has been instilled in so many people as a result of this authoritarian framework. That so often is what the real impact and intent of these kinds of measures are; not even necessarily to punish people or to imprison people online as a result of their attempts to speak freely, but what it's designed to do is to send a message to citizens everywhere that, look, if we can arrest Pavel Durov, one of the richest men on the planet, and if we can make Elon Musk the target and the subject of a criminal investigation, if we're going to exclude entire platforms, social media platforms from all of these countries, think about what we can do to you, if you try and remain private online and speak against our government. One of the reasons why I've been talking about the reporting I've been doing in Brazil over the last two weeks that is aimed at this judge who has consolidated what I can only describe as tyrannical power, and I talked about before how amazing it is to watch, to live in a country that is democratic, that you've always considered free, is kind of slowly tilt into, you know, and it goes gradually, so every time something gets normalised, people accept it and then it gets a little bit more normalised. Before you realise it, you're living in a country where a lot of people go to prison for speaking online against the government or speaking online against this judge. People get vanished off the internet with no trial. None of this happens with a trial. None of this happens with due process. It's all done by the sweep and sign of a pen in secret, with no justification and no evidence. And there's no one to appeal to it because it's being done by the Supreme Court. And the reporting that we've done over the past two weeks, which is based on a massive archive from this judge's chambers – what he did on Thursday was he opened a criminal inquiry into how we did this reporting and to who our sources were. And obviously, that is designed to say that if you even speak to a journalist, if you want to be a source to a journalist and report on anything that I'm doing, I will open a criminal investigation. I will lead that criminal investigation. So I, the judge, am the supposed victim of what he's calling fake news, which is a crime in Brazil, and he's the enforcer of it. So imagine if you have the power to have any newspaper article about you just to create fake news, which is what every

government official thinks of any negative reporting about them. And they always have. It's just that ordinarily that used to be the right of a free press, and now it's considered a crime. And during the course of this reporting, I have found so often so many people who are very concerned about and afraid of the powers of this judge and are petrified of speaking out publicly against him for very good reason. That is the climate of fear that oftentimes is even more repressive than the actual censorship itself. It fosters self-censorship and conformity. Because, you know in sort of this visceral, instinctive way, that that's the best way for you to stay safe. And so watching Pavel Durov get put in handcuffs upon getting off his private jet for the crime of complicity in other people's crime throttling free speech on the internet is designed to say we are very, very serious about criminalising the free flow of information online to the extent that we don't like that information. We're going to call it disinformation and call it hate speech. And we're going to not just accuse the people who are spreading that information of being criminals, but the people who permit it, who give them a platform to use it.

Edward Snowden, who, as I said, unravelled his entire life in order to defend the cause of a free internet. I mean, ultimately, that's what Snowden's cause was, even though the initial most obvious cause was the defence of the right to privacy, what it really was was an attempt to prevent the internet from becoming what the opposite of what it was supposed to be this kind of place for free, liberated, egalitarian organisation and exchange of ideas and information by people all over the world, and instead converting it into one of the most unprecedented tools of coercion and surveillance and censorship and propaganda ever known. That was Edward Snowden's cause. Not just the narrow issue privacy, but the question of a free internet. And so he went – and remember, Edward Snowden still faces life in prison. If he left Russia, he would be immediately detained by the US government, put in a national security prison, the United States charged him with multiple felonies, even though much of what Snowden revealed was found by courts to have been illegal. Not his disclosures, but the actions of the government officials that he permitted us to report on and to disclose. But again, anybody who was a threat to this system, as shown with Julian Assange, they're trying to show that Snowden is going to be somewhat treated very harshly. So here's what he had to say yesterday. Quote, "The arrest of Pavel Durov is an assault on the basic human rights of speech and association. I am surprised and deeply saddened that Macron has descended to the level of taking hostages as a means of gaining access to private communications. It lowers not only France, but the world.

Now, one of the justifications that France is using for trying to stir public sentiment against Telegram and against Pavel Durov is by claiming that Telegram and Pavel Durov are not just facilitating free speech, but they're also facilitating things like the trading and sharing of child pornography and pornographic images of children and things of that nature. And what I can tell you is that from the very first attempts to try and censor the internet, to prevent the internet from being free, back in the mid-nineties, one of the very first attempts to censor the internet was when there was a bombing at the Oklahoma City Courthouse. They eventually convicted Timothy McVeigh for it. It was during the Clinton administration. And the Clinton administration immediately exploited that crime to say, look, we have these far right militants

in our country who are very dangerous, and they're communicating with one another online, they're radicalising each other online, so we need a backdoor to the internet. To the encryption that is used on the internet, because we can't allow the government to be excluded from conversations that people are having. And they use the threat of terrorism to scare people into believing that the government needed that access. They use the threat of child pornography as well, going all the way back to the very beginning. One of the first controversies was in 1994, when the government wanted to install what was called a Clipper chip. And here you see The New York Times in April of 1994. The headline is: *Of Privacy and Security: The Clipper Chip Debate*. And it reported this, quote, "The Clinton administration's goal is to make it easier for law enforcement officials to conduct legal wiretaps on new generations of devices that send information over the telephone system, including wireless phones, computers, and facsimile machines. The hearing, before subcommittees of the Senate Judiciary Committee and the House Committee on Science and Technology, have been called to review the adoption of Clipper as a new encryption standard, a move that has been widely criticised on privacy grounds, and to explore modifications to alternatives. It's the hope of the Administration officials that Clipper will eventually become a standard part of telephones and other communication devices. The Administration noted in a statement in February announcing its endorsement of Clipper as the new encryption standard, quote, 'Unfortunately, the same encryption technology that can help Americans protect business secrets and personal privacy can also be used by terrorists, drug dealers, and other criminals'."

Fear mongering has always been the way that governments erode people's liberties by saying that there are these terrible people doing these scary things, and unless you give us the power to spy and take away your privacy and free speech, there's no way for us to protect you from that. The FBI director during the Clinton years was Louis Freeh. And he appeared before the House committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime in March of 1995, where he talked about the need for the FBI to be able to access the internet and not be frozen out of people's conversations. And he said, quote, "Even though access is all but assured an even more difficult problem with court authorised warrant wiretaps looms. Powerful encryption is becoming commonplace. The drug cartels are buying sophisticated communications equipment. Unless the issue of encryption is resolved soon, criminal conversations over the telephone and other communication devices will become indecipherable by law enforcement. This, as much as any issue, jeopardises the public safety and national security of this country. Drug cartels, terrorists and kidnappers will use telephones or other communication media with impunity, knowing that their conversations are immune from our most valuable investigative technique". Now, is it true that if you have a measure of privacy online, if you allow encryption, if you keep the government out of conversations, if you allow free speech online that that might be abused and exploited by criminals doing bad things? Of course that's possible. That's true of every freedom. We don't allow the government to barge into people's homes without a search warrant, without going to a court and convincing a court that there's probable cause to believe that the person inside has committed a crime, or there's evidence of a crime inside the house, even though we know that that makes police work a lot more difficult. Police would have a much easier time catching paedophiles and child pornographers

and rapists, all kinds of bad people, if we got rid of the requirement that the police first get a warrant before entering our home. If they could just enter homes at random, they probably catch a lot more criminals. They enter your home. They don't have a search warrant. No proof. They start looking at your computer, other people's computers, and they find things on there that they decide are criminal. No warrant, no prior restraint. Unfortunately for them the Constitution requires that because security is not the only value, it often conflicts with freedom and privacy. And we make that balance all the time. But the government is constantly trying to get you to focus on pedophilia and child pornography and terrorism and drug trafficking as a way for you to say, oh, we cannot have any platforms that allow any degree of free speech or privacy. Here is what the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the founder of it, John Perry Barlow, said back in October 1993. J.P. Barlow was one of the pioneers of internet freedom, one of the main theorists of internet freedom. He was actually one of the people with whom I co-founded the Freedom of the Press Foundation, along with people like Laura Poitras and Edward Snowden and a lot of privacy activists, including the actor John Cusack and others, Daniel Ellsberg, as well, the Pentagon Papers leaker. It was one of the greatest honours of my work, was to be able to work with Daniel Ellsberg, who was a childhood hero of mine, and we fought in the Freedom of the Press Foundation in order to defend press freedoms online and the free internet. And they still, although I left the board a few years ago, they still do great work in that regard. And J.P. Barlow was sort of the visionary behind it. He was on the board when we founded it. He eventually passed away in 2019, but he had devoted his life to the cause of internet freedom, going back to when the internet was still just a kind of advent of an idea, just emerging. And he understood, like several other people did, the pioneers of internet freedom, that this internet could be this extraordinary tool, unprecedented tool of liberation, but it can also be degraded into its opposite. And this is what he said back in 1993, quote: *A Plain Text on Crypto Policy*. He said, quote, "For all the debate over the details, few on either side seem to be approaching the matter from first principles. Were the enshrined threats... drug dealers, terrorists, child molesters and foreign enemies ... sufficiently and presently imperilling to justify fundamentally compromising all future transmitted privacy? It seems to me that America's greatest health risks derive from the drugs that are illegal, a position that statistics overwhelmingly support. And then there's terrorism, to which we lost a total of two Americans in 1992, even with the World Trade Centre bombing, only 6 in 1993. I honestly can't imagine an organised ring of child molesters, but I suppose one or two might be out there. But it's not Podesta or anyone else in the current White House who worries me. Despite their claims to the contrary, I'm not convinced they like Clipper any better than I do... It's the people I can't see who worry me. These are the people who actually developed Clipper and its classified algorithm, the people who, through expert controls, have kept American cryptography largely to themselves, the people who are establishing in secret what the public can or cannot employ to protect its own secrets. They are invisible and silent to all the citizens they purportedly serve save those who sit on Congressional intelligence committees. In secret, they are making for us what might be the most important choice that has ever faced American democracy, that is, whether our descendants lead their private lives with unprecedented mobility and safety from coercion, or whether every move they make geographic, economic, or amorous, will be visible to who possesses whatever may then

constitute, quote, 'lawful authority' ". I mean, think about how prescient that was. He was saying, look, there are child molesters out there, there are people with porn and there are people who are plotting terrorism, but in the scope of the dangers of our society and the massive loss to humanity from not allowing a free internet to exist, from not having a privacy online, that balance is so out of whack, just like it would be out of whack to allow police to enter a home with no search warrant. And he envisioned exactly this, that governments would be able to convince people to allow these security agencies that operate in secret to use the internet to spy on people in every single realm of their life, which is exactly what the internet has become and to control the flow of information, which is exactly what governments are trying to do. And the way they justify it is always the same.

Now, we have Congressman Davidson on the phone, and I just want to show you one more thing, which is when we did the Snowden reporting, one of the main arguments that was used was that, oh, the spying technology is necessary for child pornographers, for terrorists. And, of course, they used it, as the Snowden reporting showed, for every single other conceivable means. That was the pretext that they used it for; a small percentage of the spying was used for that. Much more spying, the vast majority, in fact, was used for other political and economic and social purposes. Very little of it had to do with terrorism or pornography or child sex crimes. And this was something, as the Daily Mail in August of 2021 recalled, that Edward Snowden had been warning about for a long time, that big tech companies were permitting spying software by claiming that it was necessary for all the sorts of things that people fear most, when in fact it was going to be used by the security state agencies in order to eliminate privacy online. And then beyond the Pavel Durov incident, as I referenced earlier, here you see from Reuters in August of 2024: *X says its closing operations in Brazil due to a judge's content orders*. That the massive, an avalanche of centrist reporters that come from Brazil to the court to X, and the threats that the court has been making to arrest access officials, like they did the Facebook official, has made it impossible for X to physically operate in Brazil. This is the trend toward which we're headed. We're the only platforms that we will have our platforms that either succumb and obey blindly every order of invasion of privacy and censorship and transfer of data to governments, or not only face banning at the IP level to make these platforms unavailable, these free platforms that are available now increasingly to criminalise it, so that the people who try and provide free speech platforms are turned into felons themselves. And I think, again, it doesn't take that much work to see how alarming that is.

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