

First They Came For Julian

Video clip (Richard Medhurst) The lack of access to journalists during this extradition hearing is an abomination. The lack of media attention is an abomination, even not just amongst corporate news media, but also independent news media - some of them even putting out statements saying that, 'oh, where's the attention on the Assange trial' and criticising them and then continuing not to cover the Assange hearing. This is an attack on press freedoms. It's an attack on whatever semblance of justice the U.K. system has. It's a violation of EU law. It's a violation of UK law, U.S. law, international law. And it's an abomination that we have Julian Assange being put on trial for exposing war crimes. We have Chelsea Manning that's been tortured and then thrown back once again in jail for exposing war crimes, uncovering mass graves of 15,000 Iraqis. And the people who committed these war crimes - Tony Blair, George Bush, Jack Straw, they're all gone. Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld. We didn't even hear their names once inside this courtroom. You know, this might be the city of London, but it's United States, it's holding the gavel. They're the ones running this show and this is disgusting. And everything that WikiLeaks did, everything that Julian Assange did, these were violent acts of anti imperialism. And they need to be portrayed as such. And we need to recall the real crimes that they exposed here. It's not just an attack on freedom of press. It's an attack on the very lives of people that are bombed every day, the people that are killed every day. We talk about them like their ants or something. This is unacceptable. And they want to make us feel sorry for imaginary informants that were never hurt. And the United States, by their own admission, told us that no one was ever harmed by WikiLeaks. So what's going on here? This is a disgusting violation of Julian Assange's human rights. It's a disgusting violation of journalistic freedoms and the freedom of press. And it's an absolute mockery of any kind of semblance of justice in this country.

Ross Richard Medhurst, welcome to Renegade Inc.

Richard Medhurst Hi. Thanks for having me.

Ross The speech that we've just seen, the speech that you made outside the Julian Assange hearing, firstly, unfussy, straightforward, right to the point, truthful, unvarnished. Were you surprised that the crowd, the public crowd, that had gathered outside that hearing wasn't bigger?

Richard Medhurst Well, this was day 18, the final day of the hearing. It was a little bit larger than other days. But, yeah, obviously, one would expect everyone to be up in arms about what's happening to Julian Assange, the threat against press freedoms and journalistic freedoms that we're up against, not just in the UK, but worldwide. And unfortunately, throughout four weeks of the hearing, we didn't see that much happening outside the courthouse. I mean, I have to give a huge shout out to the activists because they showed up from six, seven in the morning queuing up to get people that had their access revoked, including Reporters Without Borders and myself included also. So they were there all day from the morning till the evening. And I really have to give them a huge shout. But apart from them, I mean, it is shocking that the lack of public outcry around this case.

Ross Why is there such inertia around this? Why aren't the public really up in arms?

Richard Medhurst Well, I think the reason is twofold. It's because the media are not doing their job. And this is not just a corporate news media, but also when it comes to independent media, they just can't be bothered to cover this case, I think, because they're just not interested in anything that's got to do with national security journalism and exposing war crimes and covering foreign policy. And, of course, the corporate news media, they're just an arm of the national security state. So they're not going to cover somebody who goes against their narrative and the establishment lines that they parrot. And the other reason is that there's been an enormous smear campaign against Julian Assange for the past decade. They've been trying to character assassinate him, paint him as a cyber criminal, as a Russian intelligence asset. So you have people that end up shying away from his case and not wanting to defend what's happening when in fact, it's not just about Assange, it's about press freedoms worldwide. And if the US can reach across the Atlantic and just kidnap journalists, what's next? If Julian Assange is extradited, he will most surely be convicted. And it's the end of journalistic freedoms as we know it. It's setting a new precedent that the UK is going to give up journalists that the US wants and let them just pluck them out of central London and put them away in a federal supermax prison in the US for two centuries. And it's sending a message that anyone who calls out, who exposes government wrongdoing and crimes, is going to be punished. And the mere fact that they've spied on Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy and violated his legal privilege and they're putting him in solitary confinement is in violation of so many jurisdictions - the UK law, violation of EU law, international law, U.S. law. I mean, I could go on and on about this. It's unbelievably corrupt.

Ross You really take aim at the independent media and I quote you. You say, 'I demand better from the independent media'. Why have they - because the clue's in the title, independent media - why have they been such cowards when it's come to this?

Richard Medhurst I think one of the main issues is that they don't focus on foreign policy to begin with.

Ross Right.

Richard Medhurst So, I mean, I could say the same thing about the coverage on Syria. I could say the same thing about the coverage on Latin America, on these coups in Bolivia, in Venezuela. I think this is just laziness and also a lack of knowledge. They just don't know what they're talking about. And they're also scared. You know, it is cowardice also to a certain degree because they're afraid of being labelled this and that or being lumped in with the Russian intelligence smear, which we hear so often about Julian Assange and anyone who defends WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. But that that's the whole thing. They stigmatise these issues on purpose so that no one covers them.

Ross And does that have a chilling effect on independent media and other journalists because they think, well, I'm a career journalist, I've got to pay the bills, I want to keep my nose clean. I want to be, you know, to keep doing this work? That chilling effect means that you don't go near these things?

Richard Medhurst Yeah, absolutely. And we're seeing that not just with Julian Assange and the war on Syria, but also when it comes to this recent scandal with the Hunter Biden emails. You know, the Biden campaign, Hunter Biden himself, have not denied the authenticity of these emails yet. Nonetheless, we're already hearing things about, oh, it's a it's a Russian disinformation campaign. So this automatically discourages journalists from questioning the official narrative at all. So it's definitely, by design, to keep people away from holding governments accountable and holding political elites accountable.

Ross How will Joe Biden blame the Russians for the birth of his son, Hunter?

Richard Medhurst I have no idea.

Ross But logically, it's the next step, isn't it? If you keep going and following that logic through, because it seems to me that America has done absolutely zero wrong in all of its history, but it does point the finger at pretty much everybody else for all of its failures.

Richard Medhurst Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the next thing to tell us is that the laptop was made in Russia as well. The FBI has come out and said that it's not a disinformation campaign and they're not investigating it as such. But nonetheless, you're still hearing from Democratic Party operatives that it's Russia. Anything they don't like, anything that challenges the status quo, is always Russia whether that's Julian Assange or the kin of political elites.

Ross One of the things that I'm sort of shocked by, or surprised by, is the omnipotence of Vladimir Putin. It seems that when anything goes wrong at all, he is behind it. I mean, he must have, what, 50, 60 hours in his day to be able to get up to that much medaling around the world.

Richard Medhurst Yeah, absolutely. He's a busy man. You know, I myself, I'm based in the Kremlin basement. So I know I hear about these things. He's a very busy man.

Ross Is that narrative and a post Russia gate, is that starting to run out of steam now - look, let's scapegoat the Russians for everything?

Richard Medhurst Christ. No, it's not. I think it's going to get even worse. I mean, can you just imagine if Joe Biden wins the election and you want to report on anything? I mean, you can't. They're going to say that anything, any kind of critique you make against the president, oh, you're a Kremlin agent now. You're a Putin puppet. I mean, this is going to be even worse than with Trump. It's going to be complete censorship. And we've seen that in the last few days. They've been trying to stop people from retweeting without including texts. They've been blocking the New York Post story about Hunter Biden. They just straight up banned the link. I mean, we're reaching new levels now.

Ross Where does this logically end?

Richard Medhurst It ends in the complete abolition of journalistic freedoms. That's where it's leading us. It's leading us down a rabbit hole of utter madness. I mean, if we can't even question a bunch of emails that are not that damning because we already knew that this

corruption is going on. He's involved in these lucrative deals in China and was sitting on the board of Burisma. We already knew this stuff. So that wasn't even the main issue here. The main issue was the censorship. And it's just gonna get even worse.

Ross The Democrats. You've branded Joe Biden as a crypto neo liberal. Unpack that for us. What's a crypto neo liberal? And where does the Democrat Party stand at the moment on the political spectrum?

Richard Medhurst Right, so I mean, Joe Biden is a straight up neo liberal, straight up. But when I said crypto neo liberal, I was talking mainly about the progressives, the House Democrats, the justice Democrats, because they were voted in on this brand of we're different from the Democratic establishment. You know, we support Medicare for all. We support a 15 dollar minimum wage, Green New Deal and all these things. And that's great. But when it comes to foreign policy, they're just as imperialist as the rest. They just won't open their mouths about anything to do with foreign policy. And when they do, it's either completely horrible and they're just parroting what other Democrats say, what even neo cons say. And as we saw at the DNC convention, they even invited a bunch of neo cons to attend and speak. But yeah, it's mainly with these House Democrat progressives. They're just crypto neo libs. And I think a lot of people who support them are as well. They just don't even know it or they don't want to admit it, because at the end of the day, they just sound like neo liberals who want health care. That's it.

Ross You were born in Damascus. A Syrian mother, British father. Both of them working for the UN as peacekeepers and also on observation missions. You say that your mother and father really shaped your view of the world. Obviously, they would. Your mother and father in 1988 were part of a group that won the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2009 there was a gentleman called Barack Obama who won the Nobel Peace Prize. Turns out Mr. Obama bombed ten times as much as George W. Bush. If you're going to break the stats down in 2016 alone, which is obviously seven years after winning that prize, he dropped 26,171 bombs, which means three bombs an hour, 24 hours a day, all year. Do you think that the Nobel Peace Prize now, the reputation of it, is in tatters?

Richard Medhurst Partially, yes. And unfortunately, I think it's been abused quite a bit more than others, for example, if we're talking about economics or literature. But, yeah, it's completely ridiculous that Barack Obama was given this prize, especially very prematurely. I mean, it was given to him before he had even completed one term or actually achieved anything that one could even describe as even remotely deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize. So it was just given prematurely to him. And then, of course, he went wild, as you described very eloquently. The amount of bombs that he dropped is astounding. I mean, the drone strike programme had a 90 percent death rate amongst civilians. And he ramped up the mass surveillance programmes. I mean, when it comes to the foreign policy he's a neo con through and through. And even in domestic terms, he described himself as a moderate Republican. So, I mean, the fact that he won this prize is really absurd. And it is a bit damning for the reputation of the Nobel Peace Prize, indeed, yes.

Ross He enjoyed the use of the word moderate. What's a moderate rebel? Because he used to talk extensively about moderate rebels. What are they?

Richard Medhurst The moderate rebels are, of course, the 50 flavours of jihad, as I call them, in Syria, which we keep hearing about even to this day. You know, they talk about Idlib, for example, in northern Syria, which is essentially the last rebel stronghold of moderate rebels. But, of course, it's being run by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which is also referred to as HTS, which is rebranded al-Qaeda. And the moderate rebels are what the Western media have rebranded or tried to market the jihadists as essentially for the last decade during the war on Syria.

Ross It's a kind of amazing whitewash job, isn't it?

Richard Medhurst Oh, yeah, definitely. Definitely. You know, the entire war on Syria, I'd say it's the most propagandised conflict in modern history because you look at the recent leaks, all these organisations like ARC, which the British government was dumping millions into, which, of course, this is common in regime change efforts. They've been doing the same thing in Venezuela. But it's quite astounding the amount of money that has gone into the White Helmets, that has gone into these NGOs that appear out of nowhere, that are created by British intelligence that have gone into all these jihadist groups, the weapons that are flown into the country. It's unbelievable the concerted effort by Western governments to try and market the war on Syria as some kind of grassroots, civil, or rather, populist uprising.

Ross Will they be successful?

Richard Medhurst No, I don't think so. I think Syria is another example of where imperialism failed, just like Vietnam. I mean, if you look at the map of Syria right now, ISIS has been eviscerated. Most of the Syrian territories have been taken back by the Syrian Arab army. You still have the northeastern regions occupied by the Kurdish led SDF. But when it comes to the CIA backed moderate rebels and the Turkish backed moderate rebels, you just have Idlib left. And I think that will be dealt with swiftly and soon, hopefully.

Ross Richard, in that first half, we talked about Barack Obama. He openly now says that one of his great regrets is Libya, another failed NATO mission. But when we look at his record, not just the amount of drone strikes he's used and the amount of bombs, this is a man who ran on a ticket that he was going to close Guantanamo Bay, he was going to stop this indiscriminate bombing and the imperialist expansion of the US. I mean, when you hold him to account on those things, you can't really say that any of that was true. And in fact, when you look at that legacy, it's riddled with failure?

Richard Medhurst Absolutely. And we remember the famous line that he said, 'We tortured some folks.'

Video clip (Barack Obama) Even before I came into office, I was very clear that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, we did some things that were wrong. We did a whole lot of things that were right, but we tortured some folks.

Richard Medhurst He lied about mass surveillance. He said in 2007 on the campaign trail that he would cut mass surveillance and he would get rid of it. And then he took these programmes and expanded them, as we later came to find out thanks to the revelations by Edward Snowden. And of course, there was a troop surge in Afghanistan. He kept the troops

and the war in Iraq going, even though he ran on an anti-war message and said he would stop all these wars. And then he turned two wars into seven and started bombing my country, Syria. And then destroyed Libya, which, of course, is left out of the media now that it's become a failed state and started expanding the AFRICOM programme and now we have the largest drone base in the world that's cost billions of dollars in Niger. And of course, he failed to close Guantanamo Bay. He said he would close that and it's still not closed. And all of these failed promises, and not just that, but expanded this continued, this increased aggression, all over the planet.

Ross We spoke to Daniel Kovalik, the author of the book *No More War*, and his view is very, very straightforward, that this actually isn't a failure. This is the model that you go in, bomb, create chaos and leave and not even attempt to assert democracy or do any of the cleanup job that you would want to do when trying to enact regime change. Do you subscribe to that? Do you think that this is just now create chaos and go onto the next thing?

Richard Medhurst Well, that certainly seems to be the strategy in Syria right now. They've implemented a scorched earth policy. They've been burning the wheat. They've been stealing the oil. They've been implementing the Ceasar Act sanctions which have caused the currency to go into freefall. So that's definitely the strategy in Syria. And just in general, I think it's quite underwhelming and disappointing that the world somehow looks to the United States and the United Kingdom to just interfere in other countries and then stay there indefinitely and fix them. It's not their job to fix them. It's on the job to interfere in other countries in the first place. This is a very imperialistic mindset that most people in the world of, unfortunately, been brainwashed into believing has to always be the case. It does not have to be the case. But it certainly seems to be the the repeated model that we see with every president.

Ross You say that this isn't to punish Assad or even really to get rid of him. What you say is this is to prevent the Syrians, the Syrian people, rebuilding. Is it the case that when you stop people rebuilding their country, it is actually then easier to steal their resources?

Richard Medhurst Yes, absolutely. The Syrian infrastructure has been completely decimated. Just looking at the revenue from oil, for example, oil used to account for 25 percent of the Syrian government's revenue. All of that has been going from the hands of ISIS to the hands of the Kurds to the hands of the Americans now of shifting from one set of hands to the next. And this is an enormous source of revenue that the Syrian people have been robbed of. Not to mention the fact that Syria has been self-sufficient since the 1990s. Wheat, for example, had an abundance of wheat. It was a net exporter. Now we're seeing pictures of bread lines. This is not normal. They've destroyed this country on purpose because it's self-sufficient, because it had no debts towards the IMF, because it was giving a finger essentially to the United States and Israel next door. So that's why they made sure to break Syria. And it definitely makes rebuilding harder for the Syrian people. And that's what the whole goal of the Ceasar Act sanctions is. It's to stop Syria from being able to come up for air. And it's made to discourage and punish people who interact and engage with the Syrian government, even if it's just for the purpose of rebuilding the country.

Ross You are really harsh on independent media and maybe rightly so. What you say, and what you said in that first half, is that basically they virtue signal a lot of the trends - Julian

Assange - and then they'll quickly move on. An independent journalist who hasn't done that and gone and based herself in Syria is a journalist called Vanessa Beeley. She now is on the receiving end of a corporate or state sponsored media campaign to try and marginalise her voice. Are you surprised at that?

Richard Medhurst No, not at all. I spoke to Vanessa just the other day and I went through this email that she received from the BBC where they're essentially issuing indirect legal threats on behalf of Her Majesty's government - extremely harrowing stuff. And the audacity of it is quite unbelievable that they are daring to describe her as someone who is not a journalist, even though she's been in the field. She's been reporting on things that no one else would. They've issued her with these indirect legal threats and they've attempted to intimidate her and character assassinate her and smear her with this programme that they're making now. And this is all because she went against the official narrative on the White Helmets, which, of course, the BBC and a lot of Western media spent years trying to market as some kind of valiant NGO that just sprung out of thin air when it's been founded and run by British intelligence in order to smear the Syrian and Russian governments from fighting against terrorists, which the Western governments created in the first place.

Ross The Russians have been invited into Syria. That is not something that we hear on a regular basis. Assad has said to Putin, you come here and fight these terrorists. We want rid of them. Why don't we hear that more regularly? And is it the case that Putin realises that if Syria blows into another Libya, actually, the geopolitical risk is significant not just for Russia, but for wider Europe?

Richard Medhurst Absolutely. I mean, just from the Iraq war in 2003, we saw what that did to the region. It's been on fire ever since and it spilt over into Syria in the form of Daesh or ISIS and created enormous instability. And of course, we never hear that Russia was invited to help Syria fight the threat of terrorism and its Salafi jihadists, which have been funded by the Arab states in the Persian Gulf, aided and abetted by Turkey and Israel and of course, by the U.K. and the United States. You know, Russia has had a naval base inside of Syria since the 1970s and Tartus and they have had a military presence inside of Syria for decades. So they've they've been there officially for a long time now. And if they're helping the Syrian government to fight terrorism, well, that's the Syrian government's prerogative. That's a decree that's been issued by the Syrian people. But to have the Americans come in. have the Turks come in and a dozen other countries ganging up against Syria and violating its sovereignty and invading it and plundering its resources, is absolutely not the same thing. And you'll hear about skirmishes between Russian troops and American troops in Syria. The Americans have no right to be there in the first place. So whatever the Russian troops do, that's because they've been given authorisation and permission by the Syrian government.

Ross Let's come to context in all this, because we can talk about airbrushing and hijacking the cognitive map. We can talk about the manufactured consent. We understand that. And we understand that, you know, propaganda in any of these conflicts is front and centre, especially in the digital or information age. In the UK it seems to me that school history focuses on about three or four things. The first is 1066. The second is Henry V 1415. The third is the Second World War. And then the fourth is our general brilliance at going around the world and creating peace and democracy. That is basically the syllabus. Is it the case that we haven't really got to grips with our history to really understand the historical context of how we got

here and unless you do that, you don't understand how you can start to get out some of these situations?

Richard Medhurst Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think the Western nations, especially the US and the UK, they've sort of capitalised of World War One and World War Two to assert themselves as these forces for good and democracy around the world. People forget these were horrible wars that nobody wanted to fight. I mean, my great grandfather was shot fighting in World War One. My great grandfather served in the RAF. He absolutely hated it and didn't even want to collect his service medals. These were horrible wars and these governments have capitalized off of them to go around and start even more destruction and more conflicts and cause suffering to other people in name of democracy. This is complete hypocrisy. And this is not to mention the glossing over of the colonial histories of France, of the UK, and the genocide that was committed by these countries and, of course, by the settlers and colonial expansionism inside of the American continent. And so we gloss over these things and brainwash generations into thinking that we're forces for good. We're not. We need to come to terms and reckon with our history.

Ross And you say that as a Brit?

Richard Medhurst Yeah, I do.

Ross When it comes to solutions, we know that you want a independent media that has teeth, an independent media that doesn't virtue signal and follow trends, but actually goes for the truth. When it comes to other solutions, what else are you calling for, because man and woman on the street often hear the analysis that you've just put out and think, golly, gosh, that happens at a geopolitical level. I don't know how to influence that. And when I write to my MP, he doesn't even or she doesn't even, have the time or the manners, quite frankly, to reply to me?

Richard Medhurst Well, the thing is that the political apparatus inside of the United Kingdom and especially inside of the United States has been designed in a way that, you know, they're not there to represent anyone. It's just by name. It's just in name that they are representative democracies. Unfortunately, they've made it on purpose that the average man or woman will not be heard and will have their concerns listened to by their elected representatives. And they're told to essentially kick dust when that happens. Now, the thing is that when we're talking about elections, people need to understand that casting a ballot every four years and expecting change domestically and abroad, it's not going to work. You know, when you look at the United States, when you look at France, when you look back a hundred years ago, you had these enormous coalitions of socialists, of communists, of unionists, of workers, of really vibrant coalitions that used direct action as a means to oppose their governments and hold them accountable. And we see none of that anymore. They've decimated unions. They've decimated any kind of direct action. And now they're criminalising it, essentially. And, you know, I spoke to Fidel Narvaez, who was the former counsel to the Ecuadorian embassy, and he told me himself that when it comes to the Assange hearing, for example, which has extreme ramifications domestically and abroad for press freedoms and freedom of speech everywhere, he told me that the judges are under extreme political pressure to extradite Assange. And the only thing that is going to work now - because the defence have already given all the arguments and the tools to stop the

extradition - is public outcry. And so this is where we have this relationship come in where if people who are not educated by the media, of course they're not going to act. That's why we need an independent media with teeth. And then people need to show up as well.

Ross So people showing up, direct action, and actually genuinely getting involved as opposed to thinking that somebody else is looking after it. That, ultimately is what you're saying is the only tool to revitalise what is a beleaguered democracy here in the U.K.?

Richard Medhurst Absolutely. Absolutely. Whether it's in France, whether it's in the U.K., whether it's in U.S., direct action is always what works. When people withhold their labour, when they withhold their civil obedience, that's when governments listen. They don't care about the ballots that they cast. I mean, if you just look at the U.S., for example, they don't even have secure voting machines. And this has been verified independently countless times. So you never know what's happening with your ballot. They're losing them. They're having a scandal with Trump essentially trying to ban voting by mail. It's ridiculous. You can't rely on a representative democracy that is run by corporations because corporations only listen to money. So you have to withhold your labour and you have to withhold your civil obedience and general strikes, rent strikes, debt strikes, these are the things that get things done, that get substantive change implemented.

Ross Finally, who's going to win the U.S. election?

Richard Medhurst My gut tells me Donald Trump. I think that his base is more loyal. I think they will show up. Joe Biden, I mean, I just don't see him exciting the base as much as Donald Trump does. Again, it's just a hunch.

Ross Richard Medhurst, thank you very much for your time.

Richard Medhurst Thank you for having me on. It's been a pleasure.