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It's been ten days since the whistleblower website WikiLeaks published the massive archive of classified military records about the war in Afghanistan, but the fallout in Washington and beyond is far from over. Justice Department lawyers are reportedly exploring whether WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange could be charged with violating the Espionage Act of 1917 for publishing the classified Afghan war documents. Meanwhile, investigators in the Army's criminal division have reportedly questioned two students in Boston about their ties to WikiLeaks and Private First Class Bradley Manning, a leading suspect in the leak. We speak with WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange.

AMY GOODMAN: It's been ten days since the whistleblower website WikiLeaks published the massive archive of classified military records about the war in Afghanistan, the largest leak in US history with some, oh, more than 91,000 documents released. But the fallout in Washington and beyond is far from over. Justice Department lawyers are reportedly exploring whether WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange could be charged with violating the Espionage Act of 1917 for publishing classified Afghan war documents.

On Thursday, authorities at Newark Liberty International Airport detained and questioned a twenty-seven-year-old WikiLeaks volunteer named Jacob Appelbaum. He was questioned for three hours, had his laptop computer and three cellphones seized. Appelbaum is a US citizen who was arriving at Newark after an international flight.

Meanwhile, investigators in the Army's criminal division have reportedly questioned two students in Boston about their ties to WikiLeaks and Private First Class Bradley Manning, a leading suspect in the leak. Adrian Lamo, the hacker who turned Manning in, says two students at MIT have admitted to him that they assisted Manning in downloading and distributing the leaked documents.

At a news conference in the Pentagon last week, Defense Secretary Robert Gates denounced the leaking of the documents.

DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT GATES: The battlefield consequences of the release of these documents are potentially severe and dangerous for our troops, our allies and Afghan partners, and may well damage our relationships and reputation in that key part of the world. Intelligence sources and methods, as well as military tactics, techniques and procedures, will become known to our adversaries. This department is conducting a thorough, aggressive investigation to determine how this leak occurred, to identify the person or persons responsible, and to assess the content of the information compromised.

AMY GOODMAN: Speaking at the same news conference, Admiral Mike Mullen, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, accused WikiLeaks of having blood on its hands.

ADM. MIKE MULLEN: Mr. Assange can say whatever he likes about the greater good he thinks he and his source are doing, but the truth is, they might already have on their hands the blood of some young soldier or that of an Afghan family. Disagree with the war all you want, take issue with the policy, challenge me or our ground commanders on the decisions we make to accomplish the mission we've been given, but don't put those who willingly go into harm's way even further in harm's way just to satisfy your need to make a point.

AMY GOODMAN: That was the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mike Mullen.

We're joined on the phone now from Britain by Julian Assange, the editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks. Why don't you start off by responding to this charge that you have blood on your hands, Julian?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, we've got to be careful, Amy. Mullen actually was quite crafty in his words. He said "might already have" blood on my hands. But the media has gone and turned that into a concrete definition. There is, as far as we can tell, no incident of that. So it is a speculative charge. Of course, we are treating any possible revelation of the names of innocents seriously. That is why we held back 15,000 of these documents, to review that.

Now, some names may have crept into others and may be unfortunate, may not be. But you must understand that we contacted the White House about that issue and asked for their assistance in vetting to see whether there would be any exposure of innocents and to identify those names accordingly. Of course, we would never accept any other kind of veto, but in relation to that matter, we requested their assistance via the *New York Times*, who the four media partners involved—us,

Der Spiegel

,
The Guardian

and the

Times

—agreed would be the conduit to the White House so we wouldn't step on each other's toes. Now, the White House issued a flat denial that that had ever happened. And we see, however, that in an interview with CBS News, Eric Schmidt, who was our contact for that, quoted from the email that I had relayed to the White House, and that quote is precisely what I had been saying all along and completely contradicts the White House statement.

AMY GOODMAN: Julian Assange, you're correct that even when Admiral Mike Mullen was on *Meet the Press*

this week and was challenged about the statement about blood on the hands, that he said "could"—you're right—or "might." But he also pointed out, as

Newsweek

did, they said that the Taliban has begun to threaten Afghans listed in the document as aiding American troops. What is your response to that?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, we have to be careful again. I reviewed the statement of someone that a London paper claimed to be speaking for some part of the Taliban. Remember, the Taliban is actually not a homogenous group. And the statement, as far as such things go, was fairly reasonable, which is that they would not trust these documents; they would use their own intelligence organization's investigations to understand whether those people were defectors or collaborators, and if so, after their investigations, then they would receive appropriate punishment. Now, of course, that is—you know, that image is disturbing, but that is what happens in war, that spies or traitors are investigated.

Now, these statements, all together, are designed to distract from the big picture. And it's really quite fantastic that Gates and Mullen, Gates being the former head of the CIA during Iran-Contra and the overseer of Iraq and Afghanistan, and Mullen being the military commander for Iraq and Afghanistan—I'm not sure what his further background is—who have ordered assassinations every day, are trying to bring people on board to look at a speculative understanding of whether we might have blood on our hands. These two men arguably are

wading in the blood from those wars. According to the statistics we pulled out of the Afghan War Diary, those reports covering six years, we see in the internal reporting itself, just of the regular US Army and not the top-secret operations, that 20,000 people have been killed. And similarly, we know from Iraq Body Count that there's 108,000 people, where there's media reports and other evidence to show, that have died in Iraq. The hypocrisy in these statements is extraordinary.

AMY GOODMAN: Julian, Marc Thiessen, the former chief speechwriter for President George W. Bush and a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, wrote a [column](#) in Tuesday's

Washington Post

calling WikiLeaks a "criminal enterprise." He went on to write—let me quote—"Assange is a non-U.S. citizen operating outside the territory of the United States. This means the government has a wide range of options for dealing with him. It can employ not only law enforcement but also intelligence and military assets to bring Assange to justice and put his criminal syndicate out of business. The first step is for the Justice Department to indict Assange." Again, these are the words of Marc Thiessen, who is the former speechwriter for George W. Bush, writing in *Washington Post*

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JULIAN ASSANGE: Yeah, extraordinary. But I see, we can guess, what perhaps would have happened to this organization under Bush. But we should have some concerns in that Obama has authorized the assassination of US citizens overseas. And what will happen? Will that be—we'll see some statement leading to that sort of behavior. It appears that this administration is not above that. I see this a bit as a floating balloon that Thiessen has put up. Of course, he is no doubt doing it in order to show that he's at the vanguard of that school of thought. And it will be seen whether that balloon gets shot down or not by the American people. And if it doesn't get shot down by criticism, then it will be assumed that that behavior is in some way acceptable. Now, in Europe, it's another matter. What Thiessen is saying is that US forces would enter European territory without—illegally and conduct an illegal act, like they did in Italy, kidnapping some al-Qaeda. But disturbing to me is to see these references to deal with journalists that were previously done to al-Qaeda.

AMY GOODMAN: Let me ask you about Jacob Appelbaum, a volunteer for WikiLeaks who was held at Newark Airport, when he came in, for a number of hours, detained and questioned. Can you explain what happened to him, what you understand happen to him?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, my understanding—and I haven't spoken to Jacob, however; you

know, this is sort of third-hand reports—is that, yes, he was detained after coming back from—let's start it from the beginning. So, Jacob filled in for me at a talk in New York City. And at that talk, some six Homeland Security persons arrived, and Jacob left and then came to Europe briefly. And on his return, he was detained at the airport and asked questions for some three-and-a-half hours. He was not permitted to call a lawyer or make, indeed, any phone call at all. His three phones were seized, and his laptop briefly seized. The phones have not been returned. And he was asked questions about his political views on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

AMY GOODMAN: He was asked about where you are.

JULIAN ASSANGE: Yes, I've heard that report, as well. My understanding is that he did not comply with those sorts of requests.

AMY GOODMAN: He was also approached afterwards at a Defcon conference where he was speaking about the Tor Project. What is the Tor Project?

JULIAN ASSANGE: So, the Tor—I have some interference here on the line. The Tor—the Tor Project is—I'm sorry, Amy, the interference here is too bad. Can you perhaps call back, as I cross in from something else?

AMY GOODMAN: Julian, we're going to go to an early break. Then we're going to come back to you. We're going to fix this line. Julian Assange is the founder and editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks. When we get back to him, I want to ask him about Mike Rogers, the Michigan Congress member [Editor's note: Rogers was incorrectly identified on the show as being from Alabama], who says that Bradley Manning, who—should be tried for releasing documents to WikiLeaks, the Afghan war documents, and, if found guilty, should face death for treason. We're speaking with Julian Assange. We'll be back with him, after we clear up the interference, in a minute.

[break]

AMY GOODMAN: We're speaking with Julian Assange. I'm Amy Goodman. Julian Assange is the editor-in-chief and founder of WikiLeaks.

Julian, are you there? We're just trying to fix the phone line.

JULIAN ASSANGE: Yes. It seems good now, Amy.

AMY GOODMAN: That's better.

Let me ask you about Congressman Mike Rogers from Alabama, who said "the alleged release by a soldier of documents relating to the war in Afghanistan to ["http://www.wikileaks.org">WikiLeaks.org](http://www.wikileaks.org) constitutes treason and should be considered a capital offense." I'm reading from the *Daily Press & Argus* in Alabama. He hasn't been charged for the release of these documents. He's been charged with the release of other documents, though he's been called a person of interest in this. But what is your response to Congressman Mike Rogers?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, you start to understand that Congressman Mike Rogers is part of the Senate Intelligence Committee, so this is an individual who is meant to be—

AMY GOODMAN: House. The House Intelligence Committee.

JULIAN ASSANGE: Sorry, sorry. Yes, the House Intelligence Committee. So this is an individual who is meant to be overseeing the intelligence industry in the United States. So that's the sort of first takeaway, is that this, like, war hawk is meant to be overseeing and holding to account behavior of those involved in war.

His call for execution, well, it's not only legally wrong—Congress has not declared war, so that option, as I understand, is not available to him. Also, for an execution to occur, the President must, or authority of the President must, authorize it. Now, that doesn't mean it couldn't happen.

If the political will in the United States doesn't shoot down these floating balloons that Rogers and Thiessen are putting up, then we could see a shift towards finding that behavior or similar behavior acceptable. People have to shoot those statements down; otherwise, they will become the new norm.

AMY GOODMAN: Let me ask you about something that Declan McCullagh has written on [CN ET](#).

He said, "Perhaps as a way to avoid additional legal pressure or [extrajudicial] punitive measures on Assange and Appelbaum, a few days ago Wikileaks posted an intriguing 1.4GB file simply titled 'Insurance.' It's encrypted, meaning that if visitors are sent it in advance, Wikileaks would have to release only the key or passphrase to allow the contents to be read." Can you explain what this file is, Julian Assange?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, I think it's better that we don't comment on that. But, you know, one could imagine in a similar situation that it might be worth ensuring that important parts of history do not disappear.

AMY GOODMAN: And just to clarify, you have released more than 91,000 documents. You say you're withholding 15,000. Does that mean you have released 76,000, or 15,000 in addition you are withholding?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Yeah, we have released 76,000, and we have 15,000 in addition that our staff are working through to make sure that informers are not named. This particular collection is from a—it's labeled in such a way that would tend to imply that there may be innocent informers in there. There's certainly many of inordinacies. That's an important thing to understand, that many of these informers are using special forces and other parts of the military to conduct vendettas against their political or business opponents. Others are taking bribes and framing people by coming up with outlandish allegations.

It's really quite difficult to work our way through this. What do we do in the case of a governor, as an example, that has been taking bribes from the United States military? Do we—and collaborating with them, as a result. Is that something that is of genuine interest to the people of Afghanistan? Well, of course, it is, if the governor is cooperating with a foreign occupying power as a result of him taking money. So these things are quite difficult and time-consuming to work out. And that's one of the reasons that we ask the White House and the like to ask ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force, to help us with the labor of going through this. We are a

relatively small organization, and the labor costs and getting through this material are very demanding, as every day that the important stories are not released is another day that justice for those people that have been killed is denied.

AMY GOODMAN: Julian Assange, Glenn Greenwald and others have written about Project Vigilant. He writes, "Vigilant, an alliance of some 600 volunteers, has been scouring internet traffic for 14 years and passing [the] information to the US federal authorities, said its director, Chet Uber. [...] He said the Florida-based group [has] encouraged one of its members, Adrian Lamo, to inform the authorities about Bradley Manning, the former intelligence analyst who allegedly provided the Wikileaks site with classified military information. [...] Mr Uber said [Mr] Lamo had been reluctant to expose his friend so the Vigilant chief arranged for him to meet federal agencies. [...] Its members reportedly include the [ex-]security chief for the New York Stock Exchange and former technology officials at the National Security Agency and the FBI." Can you talk about Project Vigilant?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, it's an interesting trend that we're seeing. You know, when the Pentagon Papers came out, really, most of the impact, at least as far as I can see, wasn't from the content of the material; rather, it's—the back reaction against the Pentagon Papers exposed something else. It exposed the inner workings and thoughts of the Nixon administration. And we are starting to see something like that happening in this case, that the—if you like, the crackdown and the attempt at covering up is revealing some of the inner workings of the security sector and the Obama administration, the United States. And Project Vigilant is an example of that.

So, one of the—the informer in this case, a sort of researcher for *Wired* magazine by the name of Adrian Lamo, who's alleged to have shopped or ratted out Mr. Manning to the FBI, apparently was involved with this military contractor that had a program to engage in mass spying. The head of that—on US soil. The head of that organization says that they seen 250 million IP addresses daily with software that's installed in some 600 locations around the United States. So this seems to be a, if you like, a privatized version of the National Security Agency, perhaps giving the government a bit more freedom.

Now, we do—we don't—we have some public record in relation to Project Viligant. The rest of the statements are coming from this man who's the CEO. His interest in speaking about this publicly needs to be understood. He seems to be wanting to drum up more people in various ISPs and other organizations to install this spy software on—either for ideological reasons or for promise of payment. And it's a disturbing trend to see that indirection into a private company for spying. And he says that—he speaks quite carefully and says that the spying that's occurring on

internet use in the United States through his organization is as a result of a little sort of line in the small print that they get when they sign up, that is not seen, and that small print has been used to collect and spy on these people without breaking the law.

AMY GOODMAN: We're talking to Julian Assange, founder and editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks. By the way, that quote that I read, the piece, wasn't Glenn Greenwald, though he's written about it, but Tom Leonard in *The Telegraph* in London. Project Vigilant press release says the organization tracks more than 250 million IP addresses a day and can develop portfolios on any name, screen name or IP address.

Jeremy Scahill has stayed with us. We were talking to him about President Obama's speech and the drawdown in Iraq. Jeremy, your comment on what Julian has said?

JEREMY SCAHILL: Well, I mean, I think the attacks that are being put forward by Marc Thiessen, Mike Rogers, even by the Secretary of Defense and the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I mean, the painful, bloody irony of what they're saying about WikiLeaks and about the individuals that provided these documents to WikiLeaks is that the US is the primary force jeopardizing Afghans every day, Afghan civilians every day. When you read in the documents these assassinations, essentially, of civilians that are taking place, why is there no outrage about that? Why aren't there courts-martial of the individuals responsible for these massacres? Where are the prosecutions for murder? I mean, Marc Thiessen can write with a straight face about the crimes of Julian Assange and his criminal syndicate, and yet supports the kind of, you know, slaughter that we see happening in these night raids on a regular basis.

The other issue I would raise, when we talk about the sort of rats that Julian is talking about that are trying to hunt down people that are essentially whistleblowers, is that the *Washington Post* just did this massive series about the private intelligence industry. Hundreds of thousands of private contractors working for for-profit companies are given access to top-secret documents on a daily basis. You know, I think that the Pentagon should be much more concerned about these corporations that are potentially sharing classified information with other clients, be they corporate clients or foreign governments, than they are about, you know, whistleblowers, because the real threat to US national security likely comes from the fact that we've given all of these contractors access to this information, while they simultaneously work for other governments and other corporations.

So, I mean, I just—the main point I would say here is that journalists that dwell on this issue of

Julian Assange and WikiLeaks endangering Afghan collaborators with the US should spend a little bit of time focusing on who's been killing Afghan civilians on a regular basis. Yes, forces within the Taliban do it, but so, too, do US military forces. And there's no accountability for those kinds of killings.

AMY GOODMAN: Julian Assange?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, thanks, Jeremy. I see the sort of one positive outcome from these attacks on us, which, of course, are designed to deflect from the 20,000 deaths that we exposed in this material, including thousands of children, is that—

AMY GOODMAN: Can you repeat the number, Julian Assange, of numbers of civilians killed, that you think are—

JULIAN ASSANGE: Yeah, there's around 20,000 in this material. Because the information is sort of well structured, you can get a computer program to just add it all up. And so, there are around 20,000 individuals. Accounts of 20,000 deaths are in this material. And, you know, the Afghan government has complained that last week there was a NATO attack that killed fifty-two. So, it really is quite extraordinary that the press is—that some parts of the press are concentrating on some hypothetical threat to some people.

I mean, when the *London Times* sort of issued like—was the first to push on this. It's a rival to *The Guardian*, that had fourteen pages reprinted. And the example that they raised was that someone, who turned out had been dead for two years, that we were alleged to have killed—if you actually read the headline, the named man was already dead, but constructed in such a way that it looked like we had done it. But, in fact, the US military or something else had killed this man. To use against—

So the beneficial thing I see coming out of this is, well, we finally have statements from Mullen and Gates, that they have concern for Afghan civilians in this process. Now, of course, it would be nice to see that actually translate into something on the ground. We have to look at the garden itself.

I mean, this material was available to everyone, as far as I can see, on SIPRNet, which is the secret network, which is not a high classification. It's just a low- to medium-level classification, so available to hundreds of thousands or millions of individuals, and included Afghan informants' and collaborators' names. That is not how, for example, we do things. We always use code names. We never keep those names. And the US has simply shown contempt for these Afghans. They never really cared about them at all—and that's why it didn't help us to try and go through this enormous quantity of material to find these names—and never engaged in correct security procedures to protect its sources in the first place, because they didn't give a damn about them.

AMY GOODMAN: Lynne Cheney, the daughter of Dick Cheney, went on Fox and said, "I'd really like to see President Obama move to ask the government of Iceland to shut the website down. I'd like to see him move to shut it down ourselves if Iceland won't do it." Julian?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Yeah, a source of great delight in Iceland, actually—that statement, I mean. She is a not terribly liked individual. Well, I shouldn't say that, actually. Her father is a not well liked individual. And she seems to share the same politics and patronage, networking, their extended friends and so on. So, the Icelandic people are fierce and fiercely independent, and I'm sure they're not going to be cowered by Liz Cheney.

AMY GOODMAN: Right, that was Liz Cheney, Cheney's daughter. How are you protecting yourself at this point, Julian Assange?

JULIAN ASSANGE: Well, I would like to tell you all about it, Amy, but, you know, that might not be wise. However, there are countries, Western countries, even countries in NATO, that are strongly supportive of what we do politically. And, for example, the UK has announced—UK Parliament has announced two inquiries into Afghanistan, one on the civilian casualties and the other on what is the exit strategy and how to get out of it. The Dutch government just formally announced its exit from Afghanistan. And other governments around the world involved in the ISAF coalition have, in bigger and small ways, announced that they are trying to do something about the revelations in this material.

And all of them are taking note of what the United States' attitude is, which is, instead of immediately saying these revelations are a serious concern, we never wanted to harm Afghan

civilians or to bribe the media, as an example of one of the revelations in there, and we intend to launch an immediate investigation to understand this and compensate those people accordingly and change our procedures—that's what the rest of the world wants to hear. That's what Afghanistan, the people of Afghanistan want to hear. But instead they heard a personal attack on me and on our organization and an announcement that they would be going after the whistleblower or whistleblowers involved in this. And now we see them living up to those words and stalking around Boston, spying and harassing MIT graduates, and trunking around the United Kingdom, where they raided Manning, the alleged whistleblower, for a video release called "Collateral Murder," in her home in Wales.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, Julian Assange, we're going to leave it there, founder and editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks, speaking to us from abroad. This is *Democracy Now!* democracynow.org, the War and Peace Report. And on that issue of "Collateral Murder," what WikiLeaks called the video of July 12th, 2007, of a military, US military Apache attack on residents of Baghdad, two Reuters employees killed in that, you can go to our [website](http://democracynow.org), democracynow.org, to see the discussion and the video.