

Top US Newsrooms Condemn Julian Assange Indictment

New York Times Editorial Board: Julian Assange's Indictment Aims at the Heart of the First Amendment

The new indictment goes much further. It is a marked escalation in the effort to prosecute Mr. Assange, one that could have a chilling effect on American journalism as it has been practiced for generations. It is aimed straight at the heart of the First Amendment.

The new charges focus on receiving and publishing classified material from a government source. That is something journalists do all the time. They did it with the Pentagon Papers and in countless other cases where the public benefited from learning what was going on behind closed doors, even though the sources may have acted illegally. This is what the First Amendment is designed to protect: the ability of publishers to provide the public with the truth.

Washington Post Executive Editor Marty Baron:

“Dating as far back as the Pentagon Papers case and beyond, journalists have been receiving and reporting on information that the government deemed classified. Wrongdoing and abuse of power were exposed. With the new indictment of Julian Assange, the government is advancing a legal argument that places such important work in jeopardy and undermines the very purpose of the First Amendment. The administration has gone from denigrating journalists as ‘enemies of the people’ to now criminalizing common practices in journalism that have long served the public interest. Meantime, government officials continue to engage in a decades-long practice of overclassifying information, often for reasons that have nothing to do with national security and a lot to do with shielding themselves from the constitutionally protected scrutiny of the press.”

The New Yorker: Charging Julian Assange Under the Espionage Act Is an Attack on the First Amendment

The Trump Administration has made that clear by jumping the fence that the Obama Administration had merely approached and charging Assange, under the Espionage Act, for practices typical of journalists.

It stands to reason that an Administration that considers the press an “enemy of the people” would launch this attack. In attacking the media, it is attacking the public. The First Amendment, after all, doesn't exist to protect the right of Assange, or me, or anyone else to say whatever we want. It exists to protect the public's access to whatever we have to say, should the public find it of interest.

Wall Street Journal Editor-in-Chief Matt Murray:

Setting aside the specific facts of the Assange case, the indictment's use of the Espionage Act raises deeply troubling implications for traditional journalism and freedom of the press in this country. The right to publish uncomfortable, important information that the government would prefer to be kept secret is central to a truly free press.

USA Today Editor-in-Chief Nicole Carroll:

Investigative journalists routinely obtain and publish information the government would like kept secret. This indictment threatens such reporting and is a chilling attack on press freedoms and the public's right to know.