

In his first speech in Office, CIA Director Mike Pompeo rather than focusing on China, North Korea, or the rise of extremism, chose to announce an offensive against WikiLeaks and Other publishers. In doing so Director Pompeo characterized WikiLeaks as a "non-state intelligence service". This absurd definition would have all serious media organizations (with the exception of state owned media) transformed into non-state intelligence services'— with the explicitly stated goal of stripping constitutional protections for publishers.

History shows the danger of allowing the CIA or any intelligence agency, whose very modus operandi includes misdirection and lying, to be the sole arbiter of what is true or what is prudent. Otherwise every day might see a repeat of the many foolish CIA actions which have led to death, displacement, dictatorship and terrorism.

All serious media organizations are in the business of obtaining information by encouraging sources to step forward. The key difference between media and intelligence is that the media is in the business of publishing what it discovers to a wide audience. WikiLeaks is an award winning media organization that is well known for the accuracy and volume of its publications and its millions of readers.

Unsurprisingly it is the strength of WikiLeaks' publications relating to the CIA's illegal activities, including its attacks on France's presidential candidates and political parties and its attempts to infect its allies and consumer products with viruses that have led to Director Pompeo's claims that its editor Julian Assange "has no First Amendment protections". These claims are dangerous and should be critically examined.

Director Pompeo's statement sought not only to threaten Mr. Assange and WikiLeaks, but to definitively subvert the First Amendment and fundamental notions that are intrinsic to American democracy. The First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting free speech and the press; it is not only a right for the publisher. It is a limitation on the executive designed to check authoritarianism and guarantee the public knowledge and debate which is necessary to preserve the democratic ideals on which the idea Of America was built.

As for the CIA's attempts to demonize a publisher as a "fraud" and a public can judge what is fraudulent about an award winning decade-long record for publishing the truth and what is cowardly about WikiLeaks standing up to years of authoritarian bullying. Director Pompeo lacks irony when he suggests "WikiLeaks should focus its fire on autocratic regimes" while simultaneously calling for a crackdown on free speech.

Director Pompeo's has attempted to turn both the facts and the First Amendment on its head and finds himself in the company of Erdogan of Turkey (57,934 documents published by WikiLeaks), Assad of Syria (2.3 million documents) and the Saudi dictatorship (122,609 documents), to name but a few autocratic regimes that have attempted, and failed, to censor WikiLeaks. Director Pompeo's speech attempting to stifle speech only serves to underscore why WikiLeaks' publications are necessary. WikiLeaks will continue to publish true, newsworthy information that contributes to the public debate.

America's Founders, with brilliant foresight, understood the absolute necessity for preservation of a free press to foster critical debate about the actions of the government. The alternative is tyranny.

Julian Assange