

Shedding light on the New York Times shake-up

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Glenn Greenwald's book *No Place to Hide* reached bookstores May 13, so it is likely the text was finalized several weeks before the May 14 firing of *New York Times* Executive Editor Jill Abramson and her replacement by Dean Baquet, the newspaper's managing editor.

Nonetheless, the book sheds new light on the politics of the firing, suggesting a motive for Abramson's dismissal that was never raised in the ensuing media firestorm, focused largely on feminist complaints that the first woman executive editor had been held to different standards than her male predecessors.

The triggering event for the firing, according to several accounts, was Abramson's effort to hire Janine Gibson, editor of the US edition of the British newspaper the *Guardian*, as co-managing editor, making her Baquet's equal and potentially displacing him as Abramson's second-in-command. Baquet went to publisher Arthur Sulzberger, who ultimately decided to dismiss Abramson and replace her with Baquet.

Greenwald highly praises Janine Gibson for rebuffing pleas by US government officials not to publish articles based on the NSA documents supplied by Edward Snowden. At one point, he writes of the efforts of the intelligence apparatus to bully her: "I was encouraged by Janine's tone: strong and defiant. She stressed that, despite her repeatedly asking, they had failed to provide a single specific way in which national security would be harmed by publication."

After the first round of press reports on the Snowden documents, the *New York Times* published a slur against Snowden, suggesting, based on speculation by two unnamed "Western intelligence experts," that the Chinese government had "managed to drain the contents of the four laptops that Mr. Snowden said he brought to Hong Kong."

Snowden flatly denied this claim, which made no

sense, since the NSA documents were carried on thumb drives, not computers. He had multiple laptops not because of the size of the archive, but for security in communications with his journalistic co-workers.

The ombudsman of the *Times*, Margaret Sullivan, criticized the article in her online column for its lack of factual basis. Shortly thereafter, Abramson sent a message to Greenwald, through Janine Gibson, which he quotes as follows: "Please tell Glenn Greenwald personally that I agree with him completely about the fact that we should never have run that claim about China 'draining' Snowden's laptops. It was irresponsible."

As Greenwald observes, despite the apology, there was no retraction or even an editor's note to alert readers. Nonetheless, the incident suggests that Abramson had a somewhat different approach to national security issues than Dean Baquet, the *Times* managing editor. Greenwald writes:

"In a similar incident at the *Los Angeles Times*, Editor Dean Baquet killed a story in 2006 by his reporters about a secret collaboration between AT&T and the NSA, based on information given by whistle-blower Mark Klein. He had come forward with reams of documents to reveal AT&T's construction of a secret room in its San Francisco office, where the NSA was able to install splitters to divert telephone and Internet traffic from the telecom's customers into agency repositories.

"As Klein put it, the documents showed that the NSA was 'trolling through the personal lives of millions of innocent Americans.' But Baquet blocked publication of the story, Klein recounted to ABC News in 2007, 'at the request of then-Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte and then-director of the NSA Gen. Michael Hayden.' Shortly thereafter, Baquet became Washington chief for the *New York Times* and was then

promoted to the position of that paper's managing editor." (p. 233)

Greenwald's observations suggest that there may have been a national security component to the *Times* personnel shake-up. Abramson was proposing to bring Gibson on board, to the detriment of Baquet. Given Gibson's role in the Snowden revelations, and Baquet's demonstrated reliability on security issues that would hardly have been welcomed by the military-intelligence apparatus.

That state interests could have been involved is not surprising, since the position of executive editor at the *Times*, where decisions are made that set the news agenda for the television networks and the entire US media, is one of the most important and politically sensitive from the standpoint of the American ruling elite.



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