

CIA Director calls WikiLeaks an “enemy,” says Assange has “no First Amendment freedoms”

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In a speech Thursday at a Washington, DC think tank, CIA Director Michael Pompeo called the whistleblower site WikiLeaks a “non-state hostile intelligence service” and said news organizations that reveal the government’s crimes are “enemies” of the United States.

Pompeo’s remarks announce an open break with the First Amendment’s protection of freedom of speech and a threat that the Trump administration will not tolerate opposition to war, surveillance and corporate plunder.

Referring to WikiLeaks’ founder, Pompeo declared that “Julian Assange has no First Amendment freedoms.” Pompeo’s remarks were prompted by Assange’s April 11 op-ed in the *Washington Post*, in which the whistleblower defended WikiLeaks. The threat of US prosecution or assassination has forced Assange to seek refuge at the Ecuadorian embassy in London since 2012.

In his remarks, Pompeo said, “We have to recognize that we can no longer allow Assange and his colleagues the latitude to use free speech values against us. To give them the space to crush us with misappropriated secrets is a perversion of what our great Constitution stands for. It ends now.”

Pompeo is the head of an organization whose record in criminality, illegality and murder is unsurpassed. Over the course of its 69 year history, the CIA has overseen assassinations and coups d’état, trained and armed fascistic death squads, collaborated with dictators, and, following 9/11, established a global network of black site torture chambers, giving rise to a new vocabulary of words like “extraordinary rendition,” “advanced interrogation,” and “rectal

rehydration.” The number of people killed by the CIA and its collaborators over the years is in the millions.

Organizations like WikiLeaks have exposed government actions that violate the US Constitution and international law. Had it not been for individuals like Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, the public would have never learned about the National Security Agency’s mass surveillance, the Guantanamo Bay prison operating procedures, many of the worst US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the Democratic Party’s efforts to force through the nomination of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 party primaries.

Pompeo called these exposures “false narratives that increasingly define our public discourse” and “demean and distort the work and achievements of the CIA.” Those who are behind them are committing “treason.”

This thuggish statement is a direct threat aimed at Assange and all who oppose the crimes of the government. In the US, the punishment for treason is death. Last November, Pompeo argued that whistleblower Edward Snowden should be put to death.

There is an element of trepidation in Pompeo’s remarks. He and the military-intelligence apparatus are concerned that “in the absence of a vocal rebuttal, these voices, ones that proclaim treason to be public advocacy, gain a gravity they do not deserve.”

The government is frustrated that figures like Assange, Snowden and Manning are widely regarded as popular heroes. “In today’s digital environment,” Pompeo said, whistleblowers “can disseminate stolen US secrets instantly around the globe to terrorists, dictators, hackers and anyone else seeking to do us harm.”

Pompeo launched a personal attack on Assange,

calling him a “darling of terrorists,” a “narcissist,” a “fraud,” and a “coward.” “Assange and his ilk make common cause with dictators,” Pompeo said.

“Assange and his kind are not the slightest bit interested in improving civil liberties or enhancing personal freedom. They champion nothing but their own celebrity,” he added. “Their currency is click-bait, their moral compass nonexistent, their mission personal self-aggrandizement through the destruction of Western values.”

Pompeo also made clear that he considers as “enemies” “those who grant a platform to these leakers.” Many of these groups “may be small—and I mentioned one particular character a few times [i.e. Assange]—but it’s much bigger than that. It’s much broader and deeper than that.”

Pompeo compared opposition news organizations to terrorist groups and countries like North Korea and Syria that are presently targets of US military intervention. This “new threat,” he said, “has as its motive the destruction of America in the very same way that those countries do. And I’m confident this administration will pursue them with great vigor.”

The CIA director attacks Assange for “comparing himself to Thomas Jefferson” in the *Washington Post* op-ed and then explains that the government relies on “legitimate news organizations such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* ” to protect against “this threat of misinformation and propaganda.” He called the corporate media “truth-tellers extraordinaire” and said, “I’m hopeful that we will get some of the truth-telling from these people.”

In fact, Pompeo’s praise for the corporate media affirms the prescience of Jefferson himself, who wrote in a 1785 letter to the Dutch statesman Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp:

“The most effectual engines for [pacifying a nation] are the public papers... [A despotic] government always [keeps] a kind of standing army of newswriters who, without any regard to truth or to what should be like truth, [invent] and put into the papers whatever might serve the ministers” to “keep the nation quiet.”

Pompeo’s speech has been uncritically cited by the *Times* and other corporate media sources who serve as the “standing army” of American imperialism. The *Times* covered Pompeo’s remarks only to criticize them as “the latest sign that neither Mr. Trump nor

many of his most senior officials consider themselves beholden to statements they made or stances they took in the presidential campaign,” citing the fact that Pompeo once tweeted a link to WikiLeaks documents targeting Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

The fact that Pompeo’s fascistic rant calling for the abolition of free speech has passed without criticism is the product of two parallel and interrelated processes bound up with the growth of social inequality and the decline of the US’s world economic position.

First, the government is controlled by an oligarchic ruling class made up of powerful banks and corporations that have empowered the military and intelligence agencies to wage 25 years of permanent war aimed at securing world domination and access to cheap labor and resources. The marriage between the two political parties, Wall Street and the military-intelligence agencies has purged the media and political establishment of any genuinely oppositional voices. A figure like Donald Trump could have only emerged out of such a toxic climate of militarism and political reaction.

Second, permanent war and growing social inequality have created widespread social opposition in the working class to the policies of war, domestic surveillance and corporate dictatorship. Aware of growing subterranean discontent, the government is declaring that opposition is treasonous and illegal. Pompeo’s speech lays out the new standard: The First Amendment only applies to speech that the CIA deems tolerable.



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