

Assange Faces 175 Years in Prison with 17 More Charges

By Countercurrents.org

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The U.S. justice department has filed 17 new charges against Wikileaks co-founder Julian Assange. In reaction, NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden tweeted: It's a war on journalism. Journalists have reacted: "Modern fascism is breaking cover".

The new charges expand the original one-count indictment of conspiracy to hack into U.S. government computers, announced in March, prior to Assange's arrest in London. He faces up to 10 years in prison on each count, on top of another five from a previous indictment, if convicted, which make the total years 175.

Media reports said:

A U.S. federal grand jury has announced 17 additional charges under the Espionage Act against WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, who is currently in a UK jail awaiting an extradition hearing.

The new indictment, made public on Thursday, relates to U.S. documents WikiLeaks published in 2010, and alleges Assange revealed the names of individuals who were working with the U.S. government, thus endangering their lives.

He was previously charged last month with one count of conspiring with ex-intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to gain access to the Pentagon network.

Assange is serving a jail sentence in the UK for jumping bail.

"The superseding indictment alleges that Assange was complicit with Chelsea Manning, a former intelligence analyst in the US Army, in unlawfully obtaining and disclosing classified documents related to the national defense," the U.S. Department of Justice said in a statement.

"The department takes seriously the role of journalists in our democracy and we thank you for it. It has not and never has been the department's policy to target them for reporting. But Julian Assange is no journalist," said John Demers, head of the DOJ's National Security Division.

Chelsea Manning, the former U.S. Army private who provided the U.S. State Department documents and military documents, was summoned by a federal grand jury in Virginia, but she refused to testify. Manning refusing to testify against Wikileaks said: "I'd rather starve to death."

She is currently in jail, facing indefinite confinement for contempt of court. There was no indication Manning was in any way involved with the new charges.

Assange is currently in the Belmarsh crown prison outside of London, serving his 50-month prison sentence for violating UK bail by seeking asylum in Ecuador, and awaiting a hearing on the US extradition request.

Meanwhile, Swedish prosecutors are talking about reviving the sexual assault charges against Assange, based on claims that he had consensual but unprotected sex with two women in 2010.

War on journalism, says Snowden

The fate of journalism as we know it is now at stake, after Washington indicted Assange under the Espionage Act, NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden tweeted in reaction to 17 new charges against the WikiLeaks founder.

“The Department of Justice just declared war – not on Wikileaks, but on journalism itself,” Snowden tweeted Thursday, adding “this is no longer about Julian Assange: This case will decide the future of media.”

Snowden affirmed the case was much bigger than Assange.

Madness, says Wikileaks

WikiLeaks has also reacted by slamming the move as “madness” and declaring “the end of national security journalism” and even the First Amendment itself.

Modern fascism: react journalists

The U.S. government’s indictment of Wikileaks publisher Julian Assange on 17 additional charges has shocked and horrified journalists who are calling it an unprecedented attack on press freedom.

Under the draconian Espionage Act, which has never before been used against a journalist publishing classified information, Assange faces up to 10 years in prison for each charge.

Actual journalists are horrified by the “unprecedented assault on the First Amendment.”

“This is the first time in history that anyone operating in a journalistic capacity has been charged under the Espionage Act,” Michael Tracey tweeted, adding in another tweet that the charges represented “the gravest attack on the First Amendment in years — possibly ever.” Even the Obama administration, which prosecuted more whistleblowers under the Espionage Act than all previous administrations combined, ultimately opted not to pursue charges against Assange, concerned such prosecution would violate the First Amendment.

John Pilger declared: “Modern fascism is breaking cover”.

The famous journalist warned the mainstream media (MSM) that they were next.

The Intercept’s Glenn Greenwald highlighted the hypocrisy of the MSM “proclaiming to be so very concerned about attacks on a free press” while remaining mute on Assange’s

prosecution – or even cheering it on.

Jeffrey St. Clair of *CounterPunch* made an important distinction between Wikileaks' journalism and the mainstream media, however: "Assange has had to issue fewer corrections than the NYT and none of his stories has helped launch a war."

Even some mainstream media journalists finally seemed to realize the gravity of the situation.

"What happens to Assange today can happen to the NYT or WaPo tomorrow," investigative journalist James Ball tweeted.

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