

PICKING AND CHOOSING WHICH JOURNALISTIC OUTLETS TO TREAT AS JOURNALISTIC OUTLETS

Tuesday, Philip Shenon reported that Wikileaks wanted the Defense Department's help reviewing the next batch of documents it will release for names that should be redacted.

Julian Assange wants the Pentagon's help.

His secretive Wikileaks website tells The Daily Beast it is making an urgent request to the Defense Department for help reviewing 15,000 still-secret American military reports to remove the names of Afghan civilians and others who might be endangered when the website makes the reports public.

[snip]In a phone interview Tuesday with The Daily Beast, Schmitt said the site wanted to open a line of communication with the Defense Department in order to review an additional 15,000 classified reports in an effort to "make redactions so they can be safely published." Schmitt said that these reports also relate to American military operations in Afghanistan.

It was a good play from Wikileaks, as it would place Wikileaks in the same position as newspapers like NYT and WaPo which occasionally spike information the government says is particularly sensitive. However, the government chose to pretend it doesn't have this kind of conversation all the time, and also to pretend that it doesn't regularly do FOIA reviews for this kind of information.

Instead, DOD spokesperson Geoff Morrell, doing

his best Agent Smith imitation, “demand[ed]” that Wikileaks return all the documents it has received, repeating “do the right thing” over and over.

Of course, no other journalistic outlet would do what Morrell called “doing the right thing.” (To the credit of some of the journalists covering Morrell’s Agent Smith show, they seem somewhat dubious of the claims logic.)

Meanwhile, DOD has also revoked Michael Hastings’ permission embed in Afghanistan, claiming the unit in question does not trust Hastings (though the move appears to be retaliation for Hastings’ refusal to cooperate in a DOD IG probe of Hastings’ article).

The government is not supposed to license favored press in this country. But what DOD is doing is choosing only to play ball with those outlets with which it is chummy enough to largely influence the coverage of.

Which I suppose makes it different than a license. It’s like a membership in a secret tree house that you’ve got to know the secret password to belong to.