

‘We’re after leakers, not journalists’: DOJ defends crackdown on leaks of classified info

US Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein has said his office is to “respond appropriately” to the issue of increasing leaks in the US, and warned there is a possibility that reporters, not just their sources, might be held accountable.

“We don’t prosecute journalists for doing their jobs. We look at the facts and circumstances of each case and we determine whether somebody has committed a crime and whether it’s appropriate to hold them accountable for it,” Rosenstein said in an interview on ‘Fox News Sunday.’

However, he said, there might be some exceptions where a reporter might become a suspect in a leak case as well as its source.

“Generally speaking, reporters who publish information are not committing a crime. But there might be a circumstance where they do. You know, I haven’t seen any of those today, but I wouldn’t rule it out in the event that there were a case where a reporter was purposely violating the law, then they might be a suspect as well,” he said.

A new unit within the FBI has been created “to focus on those leaks,” he said, adding that the government is “going to devote whatever resources are necessary to get them under control.”

“Criminal prosecution isn’t the only way to prevent leaks, but it’s an important part of the solution,” he said.

“We’re after the leakers, not the journalist,” the deputy attorney general claimed, adding that the Justice Department has not yet revised any policies with regard to reporters.

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Earlier this week, his boss, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, described the issue of leaks in the country as a threat to national security, warning of a possible crackdown on those who are spreading information illegally.

“We respect the important role that the press plays and will give them respect, but it is not unlimited,” Sessions warned, promising to step up legal procedures to hold journalists accountable for disseminating sensitive information.

“One of the things we are doing is reviewing policies affecting media subpoenas” which would force journalists to testify in court and potentially produce evidence, Sessions explained.

Under the US’ shield law, journalists are protected under “reporters’ privilege,” which gives them the legal right not to reveal confidential sources or other information that would hinder news gathering activity.

The attorney general also revealed that the Justice Department has tripled the number of investigations into unauthorized leaks, charging four people with crimes so far. The department has received almost as many criminal referrals over leaks as over the past three years combined, Sessions told reporters Friday.

Sessions also noted that it is the responsibility of government agency workers to stop leaking information which concerns national security. “This culture of leaking must stop,” Sessions stated.

Source: <https://www.rt.com/usa/398811-doj-leaks-journalists-crackdown/>

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