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Front Page Edit Page Other Page

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## A Free Press in Cold War Time

**P**RESIDENT Kennedy's request that the nation's press practice self-censorship during this "time of peace and peril which knows no precedent in our history" will get thoughtful attention from editors across the land. There will be few to see in it any threat of government-imposed suppression. We do not.

For the problem Mr. Kennedy discussed before the Bureau of Advertising of the American Newspaper Publishers Association is obviously grave. Our way of life is indeed "under attack"—of a kind never met before—and the threat will not vanish overnight or next month or next year. It is true that "Those who make themselves our enemy are advancing around the globe." It is true that in more than one area "The survival of our friends is in danger."

The President had every right to force these grim facts on the attention of the American people. For there must be a decision, stated or tacit, on how the danger is to be met. In his mind, evidently, the decision has already been taken. Covert attack must be met by covert defense and counter-attack. The problem is how defense and counter-attack can be covert in a country where the press is free.

Is the nation prepared to fight the kind of undeclared war the President described? An episode in such a war—the war over Cuba—is just behind us. We know now that the government of the United States, through the Central Intelligence Agency and with cooperation from defense forces, had a large part in mounting and conducting the landings that ended in almost utter failure. And what is the reaction of the

American people?

Certainly the reaction is not one of surprise that our government had a hand in this adventure; and if there is shock, it grows out of the catastrophe itself. Not many Americans are critical of the decision to intervene in Cuba in this way—they are critical because blunders were made, because the objective was not achieved, because lives were thrown away to little or no purpose, because both the reputation and prestige of the United States suffered.

So the President is probably right and the nation is prepared to fight Communism with its own weapons in this "cold and secret war." If so, what is the responsibility of the press? Mr. Kennedy suggests that it is to impose self-censorship, as the press did during World War II, and we have no doubt that responsible editors will ask themselves, when they come upon information that might help the enemy, whether it is in the public interest to print it.

But to ask this question is not to answer it. In the light of what we know now, it might have been better if some newspapers that practiced self-censorship about preparations for the Cuban debacle had printed what they knew. The disaster might have been avoided in that case—and no one is contending that disclosures in the press were responsible for the fiasco.

The press will try to meet its difficult duty. The government must not ask it to practice deception, however, and must be as open as it can. Here are the principles for beginning to solve the problem. Let us recognize that no perfect solution will be found.