

Page	Page	Page
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RESIDENT KENNEDY has asked American newspapers to voluntarily censor news not in the "national interest."

This is in keeping with his campaign theme that a new sense of urgency toward America's role in the world is needed.

But it's too bad the President didn't translate this sense of urgency into a more serious study of the Cuban situation, rather than an assault on the basic principles of a free press.

Obviously, the national interest is subject to many different interpretations. That's what makes us the sort of country we hope the under-developed nations of the world will want to emulate.

In the Cuban crisis, there was undoubtedly a school of thought that felt the national interest would be best served by exposing preparations on this soil for a military expedition to a foreign country. This line of reasoning would deem it against the national interest for this country to be party to an undertaking that might brand us an aggressor nation in the eyes of the world.

From this point of view it would definitely have been in the national interest to expose and publicize the Cuban invasion attempt. And from the administration's point of view such publicity would have been very much against the national interest. This country ought to be strong enough to withstand such differences of opinion.

The Boston Globe, in editorially reviewing the President's request in the light of the Cuban situation, made a good point:

"It seems clear enough by now that the invasion failed not because of anything that was printed, but because of what was not printed and what the CIA should have found out and did not. The predicted mass uprising against Castro on which plans were based failed to occur."

It's true that the Russians have the advantage of being able to control their press and operate under strict secrecy. But if we become like them, why should other countries want to become like us?

D.N.