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Office of the Vice President

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REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
NATIONAL BROADCAST EDITORIAL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING  
MAYFLOWER HOTEL  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

JUNE 9, 1976

For several years now television and radio have surpassed newspapers as the principal source of news for the majority of Americans. You, therefore, possess enormous power to shape the people's conception of the world around them and the issues which affect them. The fairly recent use of editorials by radio and television strengthens that power considerably. I am all for it. It is a healthy development.

We cannot have too much free expression of opinion in a democracy -- provided it is well-thought out, properly labelled as opinion and offered with opportunity for the presentation of dissenting views.

Recently, some have questioned the magnitude of your power. I do not. I believe that the right of free inquiry and expression, freed by the First Amendment, is as vital to democracy as breath is to life. For these reasons, when I was Governor, I supported a Freedom of Information Act in New York with the result that New York has the strongest shield law in the country.

Your enormous power, your function as the Nation's eyes and ears, even its conscience, imposes an awesome obligation on the broadcasting profession to be responsible, to be objective in reporting the news, fair-minded in taking editorial stands, and resistant to the temptation to accentuate the negative for journalistic shock effect.

I am particularly concerned, now that the seemingly endless investigations of our intelligence community have ended, that the Nation get back to a balanced consideration of our enlightened self-interest, and that we regain a perspective and recognize the tough, hard realities of the world we live in, where the performance of this intelligence function is vital to our security as a Nation and our freedom as a people.

Other nations, especially the Soviet bloc nations, invest large sums of money, personnel and sophisticated technology in collecting information -- within the United States and throughout the World, on our military capabilities, our weapons systems, our defense structure, our American enterprise system and our social divisions. They seek to penetrate our intelligence services, to compromise our law enforcement agencies, and to recruit as their agents United States citizens holding sensitive jobs, in government, industry, labor, and the universities as well as the news media.

Their objectives include subversion and internal dissension, designed to undermine the will and determination of Americans to make and sustain the hard decisions for national strength which are necessary to preserve our freedom. They can and do invade the privacy of U.S. citizens by listening to telephone conversations within the United States and throughout the world.

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As the CIA Commission I headed for the President reported, Communist countries "have developed electronic collection of intelligence to an extraordinary degree of technology and sophistication." "Americans have a right to be uneasy if not seriously disturbed at the real possibility that their personal and business activities which they discuss freely over the telephone could be recorded and analyzed by agents of foreign powers," the Commission noted.

The Commission's findings pertain not only to national security and other vital governmental information, therefore, but also electronic intrusion in the business and private lives of American citizens. This is not only possible, but it is being done. Microwave transmissions are wholly susceptible. Information so recorded can be stored and analyzed through computer technology for myriads of usages all deeply disturbing.

This technology, of course, is not limited in its availability to foreign agents or governments. It is obtainable here at home by elements who have little or no respect for the law and American legal protections for individuals.

Obviously, such devices and equipment can involve wholesale invasion of privacy, in the hands of organized crime, of those who seek to steal information from their competitors, or those who seek to get information for purposes of blackmail, highjacking or terrorist activities. The President is deeply concerned about this problem and is taking steps to reduce the vulnerability of our telecommunications system.

But all Americans, whether private individuals, public officials, professionals, businessmen, citizens in all walks of life, should be aware of their vulnerability to the recording of their telephone conversations or transmissions of secret defense plans by teletype, or even the recording of microwave inter-communication of computer data. It is going to be extremely difficult to devise methods to protect the privacy of these communications.

It is tragic to think, as someone has suggested, that we have already reached the stage where the slogan should be: "If you don't want it known, don't use the phone."

Our open society is much easier for certain foreign governments to penetrate -- than it is for us to penetrate their tightly closed systems. Our society must remain an open one, if we are to preserve our traditional freedoms. But when the intelligence activities of other countries flourish in the free environment which we offer, then it is all the more essential that our intelligence activities have the support necessary to protect the national security and freedom of American citizens.

Communist bloc intelligence forces throughout the world currently number well over 500,000. The number of Communist government officials in the United States has tripled since 1960, and is still on the increase. There are nearly 2,000 of these officials now in this country. A large percentage have been identified as members of intelligence or security agencies.

We have to face the realities if free societies are to survive. The United States must have the most highly skilled and dedicated intelligence and counter-intelligence organization. This is absolutely indispensable to the Nation's security. Such an intelligence operation is crucial to the effectiveness of our global diplomacy and to a military presence that commands respect throughout the world.

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It is essential that the American people and the Congress recognize this fact, and take the steps to provide the Executive Branch of the government with the necessary authority and funds, while making provision for appropriate congressional oversight, and while protecting the secrecy that is absolutely essential to carrying out an effective intelligence operation.

For this Nation to lead the forces of freedom in this world without such an intelligence system, including covert operations, is like sending in a deaf, dumb and blind man as quarterback of a football team. Yet, correctible faults in the system have been misconstrued as a condemnation of the intelligence function itself -- a gross and naive assumption.

I started out these remarks by noting the tremendous power you people in broadcasting possess to shape America's impression of institutions and events. I urge you to carry out your legitimate function in your news coverage, reveal abuses where they occur, and in your editorials, demand reforms where they are needed.

But let us not make the suicidal error of condemning the Nation's intelligence system, instead of correcting the wrongs. To destroy our Nation's intelligence capacity is to disarm this Nation -- unilaterally. And this would be the end of freedom.

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