

Walter Cronkite on Secrecy

My friend Joseph Kraft overlooked an important point in his column of Oct. 12 ["Detector Defection: Not by the Media," op-ed].

He believes that NBC should not have reported on the whereabouts or lifestyle of Soviet defector Arkady Schevchenko; that its report compromised the CIA's security for him.

Mr. Kraft suggests that NBC's defense may be that, if it had not gotten the story, some other news organization probably would have. This suggests that NBC's motive was solely one of winning in the daily journalistic competition.

What is ignored in this argument is that NBC performed a public service true to its journalistic responsibilities and almost certainly did not compromise Mr. Schevchenko's security.

It stretches the imagination beyond the breaking point to believe that, if NBC News, as good as it is, could discover Schevchenko's whereabouts (which, incidentally, appar-

ently were in such public places as a Washington apartment and the beaches of the Virgin Islands) that the vaunted Soviet intelligence apparatus could not. Thus, if Soviet intelligence and the CIA knew where he was and what he was up to, the only people who did not know were the members of the American public—those whose names, in our democracy, are signed to the nation's policy, its performance and, least important, its checks.

If there are secrets that must be kept for the nation's security, then it is the job of those in charge to keep the secrets. If secrecy is so blatantly violated that a newsman becomes privy to the facts, it can be assumed that a potential enemy is equally knowledgeable.

And certainly the American public is entitled to know as much about its own government as is a foreign power.

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New York

Post 10/22/78