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National security not involved in Anderson government papers

WASHINGTON — Somebody ought to publish a primer on government leaks. We need to know what the definitions are so that each time we learn something our government is trying to keep secret, we can concentrate on what we have learned and not waste time discussing whether or not we should have learned it.

Last summer, for example, we wasted a lot of time trying to punish publishers for serializing the Pentagon Papers when we should have been reading them. Now, instead of discussing the questions posed by the Anderson papers, which might lead us to fascinating discoveries about the making of foreign policy, we are speculating on who gave columnist Anderson secret government documents and whether or not this unknown person—and Anderson himself—are guilty of violating the national security.

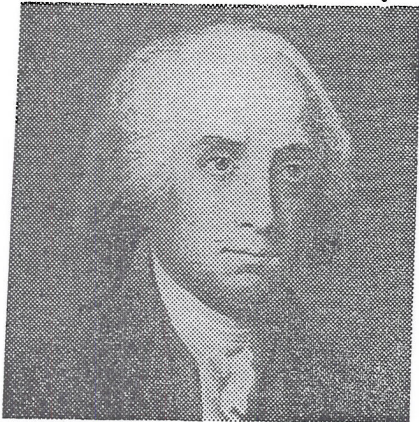
Since nobody else, so far as I know, has written a primer on leaks, let me try.

Definition One: Government is an institution with two kinds of secrets. (A) Secrets necessary to survival of the nation it represents; (B) secrets necessary to sustain the government's own popularity and reputation for wisdom.

Definition Two: The press is an institution whose function is to tell the people what government is doing.

Definition Three: Danger to national security means the publication by the press of secret A. It never means the publication of secret B.

If these definitions are fair, then there is no danger to the national security in



James Madison
'A tragedy or a farce'

the public's knowledge that President Nixon took a strongly pro-Pakistan line in the recent India-Pakistani war, that he tried to conceal his "tilt," that the State Department was slow in following its leader and that the department's slowness irritated Henry Kissinger who prodded it with sarcasm.

What we constantly trip over whenever the press discovers that which government does not wish it to know, is the assertion that the press has discovered secret A—information necessary to the nation's survival. The publication of codes might endanger our survival, or the secret movements of troops or ships or the capabilities of secret weapons. But usually what the press discovers is secret B, and the more of that kind of secret the press can publish, the better off we are.

Unconsciously perhaps, John Kennedy defined the problem during his altercation with the press following the mistake of the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy had a momentary impulse to blame the press for the defeat. During that moment, he summoned reporters and publishers to the White House and dressed them down for publishing stories about refugee camps in Guatemala and Florida where military training was going on. Then, in an aside to one of the reporters present, Kennedy remarked, "If you had printed more about the preparations, you might have saved us from a colossal mistake."

The remark is worth pondering. It means that even in his anger Kennedy realized that a small group of policy-makers operating in secret can hypnotize themselves—in this case into the belief that Castro could be brought down by sending a couple of battalions of refugees against him.

President Lyndon Johnson and a small group of policy-makers hypnotized themselves into the belief that we could win a war in Vietnam without going to the people and saying, in effect, "We want to fight a war."

And President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger hypnotized themselves into thinking they could secretly back a ruthless dictatorship against a struggling democracy and nobody would find out about it.

Lesson: James Madison said it best: "A popular government without the means to popular information is a prelude to a tragedy or a farce, perhaps both."