

With Government

New York

An independent task force on press freedom said yesterday that "new and potentially corrosive frictions" have arisen between the government and news media, posing a threat to the free flow of information.

The 11-member task force — which included judges, journalists and lawyers — said questions posed by publication last June of the Pentagon Papers remain unresolved and warrant broad re-examination.

The task force also called for tougher laws to protect newsmen's sources, an end to the practice of policemen posing as newsmen and extension of all news privileges to the underground press.

REPORT

The 193-page report was prepared by the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Government and the Press after a ten-months study ending last November. The final version included a 56-page background report by Fred P. Graham, who covers the Supreme Court for the New York Times.

The task force was chaired by Robert Williamson, former chief justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court.

It said the "present tension" between the government and press was brought into focus over the past two years by a series of government subpoenas aimed at compelling newsmen to reveal news sources.

"These subpoenas have raised in the clearest form the central issue: that the government's law enforcement efforts — particularly those directed at political radicals — are taking forms that pose a serious threat to the confidence between journalists and their sources, thus reducing the free flow of information to the public," the report said.

The task force recommended enactment of legal controls over press subpoenas, authorizing newsmen to withhold the identities of confidential sources as well as information given in confidence, except in carefully defined circumstances.

The study said the Supreme Court, in refusing to bar publication of the Pentagon Papers by the New York

Times and other newspapers, touched on an essential question of press freedom — the government's desire for pre-publication restraint.

"Even though it decided the case, the court's decision did not resolve the conflict," said the task force.

"The circumstances of the case required that the litigation be settled within a few weeks, which was hardly an atmosphere conducive to re-examination of underlying issues. What is clear is that a re-examination is in order," it said.

On other issues, the task force recommended that professional journalism associations form legal defense funds to aid underground publications "subjected to unlawful pressures from government officials."

"There has been a double standard of treatment, one for the underground and one for the established press — a double standard that is inconsistent with the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom for all the press," said the report.

Associated Press