

WikiLeaks 'tweets' Kennedy speech on secrecy

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A woman reads the internet site of WikiLeaks as on the screen at (R) can be seen a photo of WikiLeaks-founder Julian Assange. WikiLeaks, defending its decision to publish thousands of classified US diplomatic cables, sent out a link on Twitter on Thursday to excerpts of a speech by John F. Kennedy in which the former US president denounced excessive secrecy.

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"Kennedy on why WikiLeaks matters," WikiLeaks said in a message on its [Twitter](#) feed, @wikileaks, which was accompanied by a link to a YouTube video of the April 27, 1961 speech to the American Newspaper Publishers Association.

The selected excerpts feature remarks in which Kennedy condemns excessive secrecy, but left out were other comments in which the president appealed to the press to exercise restraint at a time of high Cold War tensions.

"Government at all levels, must meet its obligation to provide you with the fullest possible information outside the narrowest limits of [national security](#)," Kennedy told the publishers in one of the chosen excerpts.

"The very word 'secrecy' is repugnant in a free and open society; and we are as a people inherently and historically opposed to secret societies, to secret oaths and to secret proceedings," Kennedy said.

"We decided long ago that the dangers of excessive and unwarranted concealment of pertinent facts far outweighed the dangers which are cited to justify it," he added.

The president went on, however, to cite instances in which newspapers had revealed sensitive information to the "nation's foes" at a time of "national peril" and he appealed for restraint -- excerpts which did not appear in the YouTube excerpts posted by [WikiLeaks](#).

"In time of war, the government and the press have customarily joined in an effort based largely on self-discipline, to prevent unauthorized disclosures to the enemy," Kennedy said.

"In time of 'clear and present danger,' the courts have held that even the privileged rights of the First Amendment must yield to the public's need for national security," he said.

"If the press is awaiting a declaration of war before it imposes the self-discipline of combat conditions, then I can only say that no war ever posed a greater threat to our security," he said.

"I am asking the members of the newspaper profession and the industry in this country to reexamine their own responsibilities, to consider the degree and the nature of the present danger, and to heed the duty of self-restraint which that danger imposes upon us all," Kennedy said.

"Every newspaper now asks itself, with respect to every story: 'Is it news?'" he said. "All I suggest is that you add the question: 'Is it in the interest of the national security?'"

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