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CIA: Operation Cripple

One symptom of the CIA predicament may be seen in the fact that former director Richard Helms, now ambassador to Iran, could face perjury charges arising out of his 1973 testimony concerning the role of the CIA in Chile. Helms is a professional and a thorough establishmentarian. During the 1973 hearings he minimized the CIA role in Chile, stating that no attempts had been made to overthrow Allende, and that no money had been funneled to Allende's political enemies. It now appears that these points were substantially misleading, whether or not such testimony actually constituted the crime of perjury, and that the anti-Allende effort constituted high White House policy, originating with President Nixon.

It is evident that in the 1973 hearings Helms faced an excruciating dilemma. The judgment had been made by the President that it was in the U.S. interest to assist in the removal of Allende, though in the event, to be sure, that removal was brought about by powerful indigenous political forces. Should Helms, in 1973, testify truthfully about U.S. policy and create a blizzard of headlines damaging to the U.S. and to the CIA? Or should he testify blandly and evasively? A sound case, both professional and patriotic, can be made for the latter course. A sound patriotic case can even be made for the proposition that under certain imaginable circumstances an individual is required to lie to a congressional investigation.

As matters have turned out, the various investigations of the CIA combined with relentless press and media assaults have damaged—perhaps critically—the effectiveness of the Agency.

On May 25, the *New York Times* published the "revelation" that U.S. submarines with special electronic gear had been monitoring Soviet missile operations for 15 years, and sometimes operated inside Soviet territorial waters. Immediately following that leak, the Soviets planted mines and installed jamming devices and in various other ways crippled such intelligence-gathering operations.

Because of past and prospective leaks and disclosures, foreign intelligence agencies are now showing a marked reluctance to cooperate with the CIA.

Before it encountered the present circumstance, the CIA had the mission of influencing events abroad without publicly involving the United States. As present director William Colby put it recently, the CIA provided an alternative "between diplomatic protest and sending in the Marines." This capacity has now been largely paralyzed. Before the deluge of publicity and investigation the CIA might have been expected to assist in preventing the satellization of Portugal. No CIA activity is discernible on that front, however.

The near paralysis of the CIA comes at a time when the principal Communist thrust in the West is political, and possesses a large conspiratorial element. No one doubts that the KGB is highly active in Portugal. NATO battalions can thus be outflanked politically, as in Portugal today, Italy and Spain tomorrow, and perhaps France the day after tomorrow.

In Congress, the Michael Harringtons and the Bella Abzugs are outraged that the overthrow of Allende was desired by the White House—nor is their outrage formalistic, a matter of "non-intervention." They presumably know that not to intervene is to intervene in another way.

Their outrage derives from positive approval of the Allende regime. Thus the overthrow of Diem excites no such passions.

At the present time, small but strategically potent elements both in the government and in the media are emotionally and ideologically favorable to the world revolution, to Marxism, that is, in its non-Soviet forms. That, indeed, is what the struggle over the CIA is all about. A principal task of the Administration, therefore, must be the reform of the Agency to guard against major abuses while at the same time reviving its effectiveness as an instrument of U.S. policy, even when such policy is displeasing to Michael Harrington or to Seymour Hersh.