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## Keep CIA and press separate

President Carter rubbed an old sore the other day when, in answering a question, he endorsed the use of reporters as CIA agents overseas under "extreme circumstances."

That policy isn't new. And Carter did say that the Central Intelligence Agency is not now using news people as operatives.

The problem is it might. Carter said again he won't give up his "option" to use reporters in intelligence work, with his approval or that of CIA Director Stansfield Turner.

Carter and Turner equate that—no doubt sincerely—with duties of citizenship. Press Secretary Jody Powell said he saw no need for a law saying reporters "should not act in the interest of national security."

It all sounds reasonable. It isn't.

It might mean, among other things, that CIA-hired newsmen disseminate CIA-planted stories (the Soviets call such propaganda

"disinformation") to mislead readers.

The press, like government, is an institution whose purpose is to serve the people. The press can't do that if it is seen by the public as an arm of the government instead of a watchdog. If the public loses confidence in the press as a vital element in the democratic process, the democratic process loses, too.

Carter and Turner fail to see that any link with the spy agency threatens the credibility of news organizations. Or that keeping the press independent of government is a form of patriotism. The duty reporters have to their country includes preserving their integrity by reporting honestly.

To do less is no model for democracy. In much of the world the press already is seen as a voice of the state, not a voice of the people. Soviet reporters are often agents of the Kremlin. That's not the American way.