

## Letter to the Editors

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We agree with Dr. Usowski’s concluding remark in his essay, “CIA Director Richard Helms, the Nixon White House, and Watergate” (*Studies in Intelligence* 62, no. 2 [June 2022]): Helms’s experience from 50 years ago is indeed instructive. Picking up where Dr. Usowski left off, we might reach further conclusions about Helms’s actions through the lenses of history and ethics as taught at CIA’s Sherman Kent School for Intelligence Analysis. The Helms–Watergate saga may be a half-century behind us, but its utility in guiding moral action amid the complexities of contemporary intelligence work continues.

Every analyst who attends our *Intelligence Successes and Failures* course learns about Richard Helms and the CIA’s role in helping the Johnson administration navigate the run-up to the Six-Day War in 1967. We teach them how Helms’s Intelligence Credos—“The director serves one president at a time” and “Always keep a seat at the table”—helped propel Helms and the CIA back into the good graces of a skeptical Johnson administration. The intense focus on service suggested by these credos prompted the agency to anticipate Johnson’s needs as the crisis came to a head, handing the White House the sorts of robust assessments that preserve US initiative and freedom of political maneuver.

We might retrospectively situate Helms’s credos in the consequentialist ethical tradition: the ends justify the means to accomplish those ends. If we can trust our judgment of the historical record, Helms’s credos assert that the CIA should perform the tasks necessary to bring about a president’s use of the CIA’s services. The implied logical corollary is that CIA’s relevance to and use by the president is sufficient justification for CIA actions, even if those actions are ethically dubious, as in the case of Helms directing the CIA’s Office of Medical Services to compile a psychological profile of a US citizen.

The placid current of Helms’s consequentialism of the late 1960s becomes tumultuous in the face of the Pentagon Papers and Watergate. The modern reader may receive at least one instruction from Helms’s Watergate affair. If we use a consequentialist ethical framework for guiding our work—and our experience with students here indicates we do—then we ought to transcend Helms by remembering that the security of the Constitution and the people of the United States are the ends we serve, not the president as such. Moreover, we might exceed the boundaries of naked consequentialism and pose the still-open question that we ask each of our students: *Does the end always justify the means, or are there things as Americans and as an agency that we just won’t do?*

Sincerely,

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