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The CIA Speaks Up

It's the unhappy lot of the nation's Central Intelligence Agency that it can never do anything right—publicly, that is.

For in its assigned task of operating a world-wide intelligence system, the CIA takes no credit for its triumphs and makes no apologies for its failures.

Before the CIA was created to coordinate the Federal Government's intelligence output in 1947, the several military services and the State Department pretty much went their own way in studying and analyzing activities of foreign governments for activities that might be hostile to the United States.

Many students of history are convinced that if there had been a CIA at work in December, 1971, the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor would have been predicted or at least warnings sufficiently distributed to insure less surprise and better American defense.

The fact that there have been no Pearl Harbors since does not lessen the viciousness of the attacks continually mounted against the CIA whenever a miscue in its extensive clandestine operations comes to light.

Now comes disturbing evidence that President Nixon is personally concerned that these unprincipled assaults on our intelligence operation can actually endanger the nation's security.

He directly approved an appearance Wednesday of CIA director Richard Helms before a Washington convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

In his first public appearance since becoming CIA head in 1966, Helms vigorously defended his agency's operations as being necessary to the survival of our democratic society.

He asked the nation to "take it on faith that we are honorable men devoted to her service." On the record alone, there is no valid reason why this plea cannot be honored.

The CIA does not, of course, operate in total autonomy. There are congressional watchdog committees, and every president since Harry Truman has kept close tabs on agency activities.

Mistakes no doubt have been occasionally made, for spying is a dirty business that knows no rules, but most of the attacks on the CIA are specious and unwarranted. It's high time Helms spoke up.

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