

CIA Report a Cooked-Up Job

From the very moment it was "leaked" to the news media, the report of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on worldwide oil shortages and anticipated sizable price increases by 1985 had a fraudulent air about it.

This was disturbing, insofar as President Carter a few days later made the CIA assessment the foundation of what was to become a week-long sales pitch for a comprehensive U.S. energy conservation policy.

Few Americans doubt that Mr. Carter's motives were pure or that the American profligacy in energy consumption must somehow be curbed. But to base his appeal on what was purported to be a fresh and detailed CIA look at global energy reserves was unquestionably a wrong tactic.

Sparking the initial suspicion that the CIA figures might not be all that revealing was the fact that they roughly conformed to those of two respected Paris-based organizations, the International Energy Agency and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

However, despite using the same basic assumptions as the International Energy Agency and the OECD, the CIA managed to inject a considerably more pessimistic tone into its report. This pessimism, it was acknowledged, was done for a purpose: to provide a dramatic background for Mr. Carter's presentation.

In fact, Mr. Carter described the report (three days before his first televised appeal to the nation) as being "deeply disturbing."

Ralph Nader immediately questioned the CIA's informational authenticity, maintaining

that the data incorporated in the report probably came from such vested interests as the oil companies. But not many Americans pay much attention to Mr. Nader any more and his hunch was downplayed.

Now, however, comes the revelation that the CIA's warning of future oil shortages was a cooked-up job — even though its general thrust was correct. According to the Wall Street Journal, U.S. energy officials belatedly concede that the report released by the White House contained nothing new. In fact, all of the information utilized had been published previously; none of it deserved a "secret" label. It had simply been rearranged within a drab framework.

Subsequent to Mr. Carter's series of appeals to the American people, the White House announced it is considering a public service advertising campaign to keep hammering on the President's energy message: we face a crisis and it must be resolved. Carter aides have asked the Advertising Council, which conducts public service campaigns, to present suggestions for broadcast and print commercials on the gravity of the energy problem.

This is all well and good. After all, no American in his right mind would question the need and inevitability of energy conservation.

But if Mr. Carter is to push his program through a balky Congress, he'll need the support of the people, to whom any advertising campaign would presumably be directed.

This task can be complicated by such tactics as the presentation of the CIA's dull recital as high drama instead of hackneyed fact.