

DEC 27 1963

CIA-RDP75-00149R000700550036-9

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Editorials

The CIA Needs Surveillance

When it comes to discussing the proper role of the Central Intelligence Agency, ex-President Harry Truman has impressive qualifications. He was, after all, the one who first proposed establishing the CIA, and it was during his administration that the necessary legislation was enacted.

It is therefore of some significance that Mr. Truman, in an article written for North American Newspaper Alliance, now contends that the cloak-and-dagger activities which have embroiled the CIA in so much controversy since the U2 fiasco of 1960 are completely at odds with the role which the agency was originally designed to fulfill.

That role, says Mr. Truman, was simply and solely to serve as an information agency for the White House collecting reports from various sources (principally the Army, Navy and State Department intelligence units) and correlating them for the President's use. There was never any intention of making the CIA an operational agency, let alone a policy-making arm of the government. This, in Mr. Truman's opinion, is a role which it should never have been allowed to assume and which should be terminated before it creates serious trouble for the nation.

As a matter of fact, it has enmeshed us in some extremely uncomfortable situations already. The U2 affair was one case in point. The Bay of Pigs misadventure was another. In a num-

ber of other situations—most recently, in South Viet Nam, where it apparently financed the Diem regime's secret police organization—the CIA's role has been risky and ill-advised at best.

No doubt it is in the nature of an intelligence operation to arrogate power to itself. The secrecy of its operations makes administrative control difficult. In the case of the CIA, the agency's budget and the number of persons it employs are closely guarded secrets, known only to a few members of Congress and the executive branch. For all practical purposes, it is completely a law unto itself.

This is bad business. It has made the CIA an easy target for damaging anti-American propaganda abroad. It is sharply at odds with our own democratic traditions. And it has created a continuing risk of involving us in perilous situations which could and should be avoided.

Obviously the work of intelligence agencies must be clandestine, even in relatively "open" societies like ours. The fault with the CIA is not that it operates in secret, which it must, but rather that it has been diverted from an information arm of the President to the status of a virtually independent operational agency.

The CIA needs its cloak. It doesn't need a dagger, and it shouldn't have one.