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It's Time the CIA Came In From the Cold

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FOR YEARS BEFORE this week's announcement of a wholesale congressional evaluation of the CIA, the agency's friends and enemies were calling for investigations into its mission and value. A few half-hearted inquiries actually took place, but their focus was on intelligence failures, and begged the umbrella question of the CIA's continued existence.

Now, however, Sen. John Warner, (R-Va.) has proposed a 17-member non-partisan commission to examine the structure, effectiveness, cost, and future of an agency that has remained largely unchanged since its inception 47 years ago. One may ask, "What took Congress so long?" and a reasonable answer is that despite the Cold War's end, it took the arrests of Aldrich Ames and his wife earlier this year to crystallize congressional and public attitudes and make the proposed open-ended investigation broadly acceptable.

The commission's putative chairman, former Defense Secretary Les Aspin, will have an unenviable task in reconciling conflicting reports concerning the viability not only of the CIA, but of 11 other military and civilian intelligence agencies now under the gun. Any threatened bureaucracy circles the wagons as the CIA has done in the past over lesser issues. This is a normal human trait when jobs are on the line, and Director James Woolsey's CIA can be expected to resist close, even non-hostile, examination. Woolsey even declined to dismiss or demote anyone in connection with the Ames debacle — an action that has led Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) to call for Woolsey's own resignation.

What success the agency will have in deflecting commission inquiries depends to some extent on the degree of support rendered by the White House, and so far that has been tepid at best. The composition of the commission is crucial to a

thoroughgoing examination of the CIA's role in a post-Cold War world. Nine members are to be selected by the White House, eight by Congress, and we have to hope that all members will be intelligent, full-time, patriotically motivated citizens rather than the usual Beltway has-beens and hangers-on who comprise so many government committees and commissions. They will be dealing with nothing less than the security of the Republic.

Appropriations for the entire intelligence community are a natural subject of commission review. Not only does the CIA engage in foreign espionage, the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, and the code-breaking, code-making National Security Agency do likewise, and together employ at least twice as many persons as does the estimated 20,000-person CIA. Though budgets remain secret, the combined cost of our intelligence effort is stupendously high — as much as \$3 billion — by some informed accounts.

The almost laughable mishandling of Aldrich Ames, before and after his exposure should be critical-



AP Photo
Moscow mole Aldrich Ames of the CIA and his wife Rosario under arrest last March.

ly examined by the commission, for it reveals at best a general *laissez-faire* attitude by his superiors, at worst an indifference bordering on criminality. The commission must determine how Ames could be unchallenged, even promoted, during the years he served as Moscow's mole. And that determination —

— *Continued on Next Page*



E. Howard Hunt, who served as a Central Intelligence Agency officer for 22 years, will publish his security-themed novel, "Ixtapa," in November.