

3 Panels in Congress Plan Inquiries Into Sub Salvage

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WASHINGTON, March 19—The White House, the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency firmly refused today to discuss any aspects of the C.I.A.'s reported attempt to salvage a sunken Soviet submarine last year, but three Congressional committee chairmen said they planned to investigate the project.

Members of the Senate and the House, meanwhile, voiced disagreement over the intelligence value of the multimillion-dollar recovery operation.

The New York Times and other newspapers reported today that, according to high Government officials, the C.I.A. had secretly spent more than \$350-million to construct a salvage vessel that recovered one-third of the Soviet submarine but failed to recover the prime objectives—the ship's nuclear missiles and its code room. The submarine sank northwest of Hawaii in 1968.

The salvage vessel was built

under cover for the C.I.A. by Howard R. Hughes, the billionaire industrialist, according to the officials.

High-level Government officials said today that the sunken Soviet submarine was not nuclear-powered, as some officials had indicated prior to publication of the salvage articles, but instead was a 1958 diesel-powered ballistic missile submarine of the Golf, or G, class. As such, the submarine's potential intelligence value in terms of salvage was far less than if she had been nuclear-powered. The United States, for example, has not constructed diesel-powered submarines since 1958.

The G-class vessel carried three nuclear missiles with ranges of up to 650 miles. She also was reported to have been carrying nuclear-tipped torpedoes. The ship's normal crew was 12 officers and 74 men.

There was no official reac-

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tion today from the Foreign Ministry in Moscow, and it could not be learned what information about the recovery operation, known as Project Jennifer, had been known to Soviet leaders. There was no mention of the salvage reports today in the Soviet press or on radio or television.

The loss of the submarine apparently had not been reported in the Soviet newspapers at the time she sank in nearly 17,000 feet of water.

A number of diplomatic experts suggested in telephone interviews that publication reports of the salvage operation would not lead to any major problems in American-Soviet relations.

"This is just an episode," one Soviet specialist said. "They'd probably do the same thing if they had a chance."

The specialists added that the Soviet Union might use the salvage operation—which, the Government officials said, resulted in the recovery and burial of the bodies of about 70 Soviet sailors and officers—for propaganda purposes. But one Government official noted, "It takes an awful lot more than something like this to turn around something [détente] that two countries have wanted for more than two decades."

A number of Senators expressed concern about the cost of the operation, which was funded through the 40 Committee, the high-level group that reviews all clandestine intelligence operations.

Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, said the Select Committee on Intelligence of which he is chairman, would include the submarine salvage operation in its general inquiry into all aspects of the Government's intelligence activities.

"The disclosure suggests that the intelligence community may need a cost-benefit ratio," Mr. Church told newsmen. "If we are prepared to pay Howard Hughes' \$350-million for an obsolete Russian submarine, it's

little wonder we are broke."

Senator Stuart Symington, Democrat of Missouri, announced that he would summon William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, to testify on the salvage operation before his Military Applications Subcommittee of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee.

"I want to know what they did and how much it cost and who they told about it," Mr. Symington said. He added that he had not been informed of the salvage operation before the newspaper accounts, even though he is a senior member of the Intelligence Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"I know nothing about it," he said, "and if Colby didn't tell the Senate about it, he ought to get out."

"And, as you know," the Senator added in a telephone interview, "nobody has supported the C.I.A. more than I have."

"I'm not angry," he continued. "I just want to see the Government function."

Senator Symington also expressed doubt about the value of the salvage operation. "What would be on a submarine that sank in 1968 that we didn't know about in 1974 or 1975?" he asked. "If they were looking for codes, well, anybody would know that the Russians wouldn't be using the same codes."

House Panel to Act

Plans for other hearings also were announced by Representative Lucien N. Nedzi, Democrat of Michigan, who is chairman of the House Select Intelligence Committee.

"This is obviously a big project," Mr. Nedzi said. "For us to ignore it would not be proper under the circumstances." He said that the review would center on the decision-making process that was involved in the salvage operation, as well as "the question of law and propriety."

Mr. Nedzi added that he and other members of the House Armed Services Intelligence

Subcommittee were briefed by the C.I.A. on the project last summer.

Representative George H. Mahon, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said the C.I.A. had provided him with an advance briefing on the project and described it as something that "would have been a good idea if it worked—like a lot of other things."

The Texas Democrat also said he had been worried that news of the operation would leak out because "that would be bad for United States-Soviet relations. It's a gamble that lost."

Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, the Senate majority leader, also told newsmen today that he had known about the salvage operation. He described the submarine as old and said that her military value was not very significant, but he added that "what it contained might have been of some value."

"The best thing is to forget it," Mr. Mansfield advised newsmen. "It's past history."

Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, a ranking Republican on the Armed Services Committee, praised the operation and said: "I'd be madder than hell if [they] hadn't gone and gotten the sub. I hope they go back and get it."

The C.I.A. has asked Secretary of State Kissinger for permission to attempt in July to recover the remainder of the Soviet submarine.

Support for the operation came also from Senator John G. Tower of Texas, another conservative Republican, who said, "It would appear on the face of it that it would provide us with some extremely valuable intelligence."

"If the roles were reversed," Senator Tower added, "I am sure that the Soviets would not have any inhibitions about it."

A liberal Republican, Senator Jacob K. Javits of New York, said that the project "teaches us that the C.I.A. has been an agency of Government that has been practically autonomous." He added, "we have got to

fashion means to supervise and monitor everything it [the C.I.A.] does and see that it is authorized by Congress."

The C.I.A. refused to discuss any aspect of the salvage operations, but a number of intelligence officials depicted the publication of the account as another blow to the agency. "We're just so battered at this point," one C.I.A. official said.

Another high-level Government official expressed concern to a reporter that no secrets were safe any more. "I fear for the country, I really do," the official said. "I just don't believe that we can compete with the Russians any more."

Personal Appeals

Mr. Colby and other members of the Ford Administration had sought to prevent publication of the salvage operation by making personal appeals—citing "national security"—to the editors of various publications, including The New York Times.

The Times published its account of the operation after Jack Anderson, the syndicated columnist, informed Mr. Colby yesterday that he would not delay publication.

Ron Nessen, the White House press secretary, refused to comment on the salvage operations despite repeated questions. Asked at one point whether President Ford had taken any steps to notify the Soviet Union about the fate of its seamen, Mr. Nessen smiled and said, "award . . . for great questions."

Pentagon officials similarly turned away questions about the Navy's role in the salvage operations by telling newsmen that they had "no authority" to comment.

The attempted recovery was conducted by the Hughes Glomar Explorer, the vessel built under cover for the C.I.A. by the Summa Corporation, Mr. Hughes's privately owned holding company. The salvage vessel was operated under contract for the Hughes company by Global Marine, Inc., a Los Angeles-based company with expertise in deep-sea operations.