

HELMS OF THE CIA

Generally speaking, the CIA will not give any newsman the time of day. The agency's director, Richard Helms, a basically shy and retiring man, protects fiercely both his personal and organization's privacy. Reporters who ask the CIA about anything are told politely to get lost.

Last month, however, Richard Helms called in a handful of reporters in Washington in an effort to improve the image of the CIA, which had been damaged by two charges, (1) that the CIA had ordered the Green Berets to murder a Vietnamese double agent, (2) that the CIA had inspired the report which had the Soviet Union asking other Iron Curtain countries how they feel about a Soviet preventive bombing of the Chinese nuclear installations in Sinkiang.

Mr. Helms explained diplomatically that the CIA had not ordered one of President Thieu's intelligence advisers, Thai Khac Chuyen, to be killed and dropped into the South China Sea. The Green Berets pulled that one off on their own.

Mr. Helms is a diplomatic gent of finesse and polish who frequently finds himself in a tight squeeze. His agency tries desperately to tell the truth and make fair intelligence estimates. Frequently these are at odds with reports and estimates

of other less impartial government agencies and employees.

For example, in the recent struggle for the ABM program, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, a hawk popularly regarded as being "owned" by the Pentagon's generals and admirals, told a Senate committee that the Soviet Union was "going for a first-strike capability--there is no question about that."

Mr. Helms, testifying before the same Senate Foreign Relations Committee, did not exactly agree with Mr. Laird. Two years ago when Air Force intelligence informed President Johnson that the bombing of North Vietnam would soon bring the North Vietnamese to their knees, the CIA reported that the bombing was having an opposite effect, was in fact uniting the North Vietnamese, making them more resolved to fight to the death together.

In the end, President Johnson accepted the CIA intelligence and stopped the bombing.

How President Nixon feels about the intelligence estimates of the CIA as opposed to the intelligence estimates of the other agencies is difficult to tell at this point. If Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird is the Pentagon's boy, Richard Helms is not. One virtue of the CIA is that it is not for sale to politics, to the press, to the Pentagon or anyone.

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RICHARD HELMS WITH PRESIDENT NIXON