

## The Glomar Explorer;

Post 3/23/75  
IN RETRIEVING parts of a sunken Soviet submarine from 16,000 feet down in the Pacific, the Central Intelligence Agency was performing its prime function brilliantly. Apparently at least two nuclear warheads from torpedoes were raised—an intelligence first—though it isn't yet known if any of the sub's nuclear missiles, guidance systems or code machines were also raised. But the value of inspecting the most sensitive Soviet military gear, even gear from a sub sunk seven years ago, does not exhaust the potential intelligence benefits. With the real thing—or parts of it—in hand, the United States can now test the reliability and effectiveness of the intelligence and the other intelligence methods it was previously using. Laymen are hardly in a position to say whether the findings are worth \$350 million, which is the rough cost, apparently, of the salvage operation. Since the salvage ship itself has valid commercial uses, part of this cost can conceivably be reclaimed. In any case, intelligence collection is by its nature so speculative a venture that it lends itself poorly to conventional cost accounting, even when one is in a position to know and evaluate the gains—which we are not.

That the Russians will make more than a formal diplomatic protest, if that, seems doubtful: they would only be advertising their embarrassment and envy. Nor is legitimate intelligence collection of this sort inconsistent with detente. Indeed, detente could help the two countries to work out the differences that could well arise over future attempts by one or the other to raise sunken ships, or recover spent missiles, fallen space objects, anti-sub listening devices or what have you. The Russians, who had failed to find their own missing sub, will surely be chagrined at this public demonstration of the vast superiority of American sub-tracking capability. Together with the demonstration of a deep-sea retrieval capability unmatched anywhere, this is a telling comment on one aspect of the Soviet-American technological balance of power. No doubt the Russians will push ahead in their own work in both fields; they already were doing so. Meanwhile, Americans can appreciate better what a technological advantage can mean to, say, stra-

tegic arms control. It means, in brief, that it is silly to count just raw numbers of warheads and launchers.

The Soviets seem to have been completely fooled by the cover the CIA devised for the boat which brought up the sub. The CIA used a civilian company, for purposes of deniability as well as concealment; the company was owned by a man, Howard Hughes, whose personal reputation for mystery fitted the cover perfectly; the boat was designed for, and is actually usable for, marine mining. At the current Law of the Sea Conference, one can already hear charges that the Glomar Explorer's mission proves that the great powers conduct espionage under the guise of research. The incident proves no less that great powers, or at least the United States, do conduct research; only they have the technology. The incident will likely sharpen the global argument over how seabed mineral riches should be shared, after the current fuss dies down.

Disclosure of this operation, which took place last summer, will prevent the Glomar Explorer from going back to look for more parts of the broken sub next summer. The intelligence loss is impossible for an outsider—perhaps also an insider—to measure. The disclosure is, however, something of a political boon for the CIA, underlining as it does the besieged agency's legitimate intelligence role and its competence. The timing appears to be accidental. A number of news organizations, including this newspaper, had sat on the story for extended periods in considered response to the CIA's discreet appeals that publication would spoil a valuable ongoing national security operation. The voluntary embargo was broken only when the American Civil Liberties Union came upon the information and made known its intention to publicize it. Obviously, this newspaper feels there was valid reason to hold the story while it did. We do not believe that our devotion to the principles and practices of a free press is undercut by the exception made in this case. On the contrary, a willingness to make such exceptions when confronted with compelling arguments from a government in exclusive possession of all the facts of the matter is a mark of a responsible free press.