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Mr. Pike's Committee

THE HOUSE Intelligence Committee is trying to perform a useful service in seeking to expand its access to intelligence materials, which by tradition the Executive Branch either has kept in its files or shared with Congress largely at its own convenience. By pushing into new areas of information, Chairman Otis Pike (D-N.Y.) is making a record certain to be of considerable value to future congressional overseers of the intelligence process. But he is going about it in a very rough way.

To bulwark his claim that Congress and not the Executive should have the power to declassify intelligence information, for instance, Mr. Pike made public a document including four words which, for all their brevity, indicated that the United States possessed a certain communications intelligence capability of which other nations may not have been aware. This unwarranted disclosure left President Ford no choice but to halt the release of further materials to the committee until new rules of disclosure had been worked out. Such rules have now been established—fortunately, by mutual agreement, rather than by court intervention, although Mr. Pike had threatened to go that route for a while. In essence they involve a tradeoff of more information for the Congress and more explicit control of disclosure for the Executive. This strikes us as sensible and long overdue.

On another front, however, the Pike committee is still on the attack. It insists on questioning Thomas Boyatt, former State Department director of Cypriot affairs, on the advice he offered his superiors during the 1974 Cyprus crisis; it has also now subpoenaed a policy critique through formal internal-dissent channels after the crisis. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger refuses to

permit the committee access to Mr. Boyatt's various views. He argues that to do so would chill the Department's interior consultations and expose sub-policy-level officers to public attack for advice they had offered confidentially.

We find the Department's position persuasive. Policy-level officers, especially those confirmed by Congress, must be accountable to Congress for the options they discard as well as for the options they choose. But the first obligation of more junior officers is to provide their superiors with their best judgment, and this can best be done on the basis of interior confidentiality.

The analogy with McCarthyism evoked by the State Department is a relevant one, even though it appears that in this case the committee of Congress wishing to question Mr. Boyatt apparently is inclined to praise him for his views, not persecute him—and to use his testimony to fault Secretary Kissinger. Certainly Mr. Kissinger should be faulted for his Cyprus policy. This newspaper and many other observers criticized him strongly at the time. It is quite possible to hold him to account, however, without impairing the State Department's channels of interior consultation and without opening a door to subsequent attacks on other foreign service officers for expressed views in confidence. Mr. Boyatt, after all, was not muzzled in the Department. On the contrary, he was encouraged to make use of a special direct channel to the Secretary of State for the express purpose of registering a dissenting view. His view thus was heard—and ignored. That is a Secretary's prerogative. And if he was wrong, he can—and should—be held accountable without violating the confidential procedure by which Mr. Boyatt was allowed to record his dissent.