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Its Job Vital

Gets Any Praise

CIA Often "Whipping Boy," Seldom

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poor old Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). It is the perennial whipping boy of columnists and congressmen and of just about every foreign dictator seeking to divert attention from his own crookedness or ineptitude.

As one who knows a bit about CIA (which most of its critics decidedly do not), I get a little sick of seeing it badgered and abused by just about everybody

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capable of scratching out a sentence or calling a press conference.

Now this may be interpreted as my being in favor of sin (which most people are), but put me on record as saying CIA does a pretty darned good job of protecting not only U.S. security but that of many weaker countries all over the world as well.

True, it makes mistakes. Big ones. But only at about the same rate that the State Department, the Defense Department, the White House or my old agency, the U.S. Information Agency makes boobos.

And you'd be hard pressed to convince me that CIA's ratio of incompetents is any higher than that of the U.S. Senate.

Those who leap to the firing line when they discover it's always open season on CIA seem to ignore one inescapable fact: A good intelligence system has become as crucial to national

security as an army, or air force or an arsenal of powerful weapons.

THE FOREIGNERS criticizing CIA most (the Russians, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, etc.) know this and nobody expends more effort than they do trying to perfect their cloak and dagger operations.

What we ought not forget is that in many critical situations these last few years, the United States has been able to make the correct decision to guarantee our security because CIA had secured information that our enemies thought we could not possibly possess. The Cuban missiles crisis is an example.

Having said all this, I must concede that CIA is at a critical point in its history. Not only is it scorned the world over, but the standard device for discrediting the Peace Corps, USIA and other American agencies is to link them to the CIA.

During a recent tour of East Africa and Southeast Asia, it was made clear to me that suspicion and fear of "the CIA" has become a sort of Achilles heel of American foreign policy.

This may seem to justify the attacks on CIA in Congress and elsewhere but the truth is just the opposite. The home-grown critics are 100 times more to blame for the wild and irrational foreign fear of CIA than is the agency itself.

A GHANA OFFICIAL recently was lamenting the fact that the United States denied a food request because Nkrumah published a book attacking CIA and labeling just about every Amer-

ican who ever put foot in Ghana as a "CIA spy."

"Are you surprised that Americans would react unfavorably to this kind of attack?" I asked.

"We are surprised that you would direct your anger at us," said the Ghana envoy. "Our president took practically everything he wrote out of American books and other publications."

At a dinner in Lusaka, the vice-president of Zambia began conversation by asking me to give him an appraisal of "The Invisible Government."

I ducked the question by commenting: "I only wish CIA were capable of half the things for which it is blamed or praised." Several Zambian cabinet

members refused to let me duck, however, and I soon found myself caught in a wild discussion with people who believe fervently that CIA is in the business of overthrowing and installing governments all over the world without the approval or knowledge of the secretary of state or the President.

I LATER LEARNED that

every top and middle-level Zambian official had been instructed to read "The Invisible Government," Andrew Tully's book "The CIA," and Morris West's new book "The Ambassador."

I'm not naive enough to suggest that newspapermen and authors stop writing about CIA. Our society is naturally intoler-

ant of secrecy (which any good intelligence operation requires), so the questioning and criticism will go on.

But it would sure help if some of the critics conceded that, whether we like clandestine intelligence operations or not, they are indispensable in this crazy, crooked, bellicose world in which we live.