

Helms Tells of Using Top U.S. Businessmen

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Richard Helms, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has told senators he had a policy of going right to the top of American business firms in trying to get their cooperation in gathering intelligence overseas.

Helms now is ambassador to Iran. During a closed-door hearing on his ambassadorial nomination, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February, 1973, Helms said the CIA did not press businessmen or others to pass on potentially useful information they may have obtained while visiting the Soviet Union or other countries.

"There is no payment of money. There is no effort to twist anyone's arm. We simply are giving them an opportunity as patriotic Americans to say what they know about this."

Answering questions about contacts with American business firms abroad under CIA's Domestic Contact Service, he said: "It has been my own feeling that one should start with the chief executive officer normally because it is not fair to these companies to set up a relationship with somebody down the line that the chief executive officer does not know about or at least has not indicated that this other man is your point of contact."

An estimated 200 persons are operating as intelligence agents under the guise of businessmen, according to recent American press reports quoting an unnamed American official who apparently is familiar with the inner workings of the CIA.