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Helms has tiger by the tail

WASHINGTON — Richard Helms, who is director of Central Intelligence, has survived more Washington power struggles than any man now holding presidential appointment. For this reason, alone, the chances seem good that he will survive the struggle into which President Nixon plunged him last week.

But survival is one thing. Winning is another. The characteristics which have enabled Helms to survive in Washington's jungle fighting offer no assurance that he can put the Defense Intelligence Agency in its place, and this, in effect, is what President Nixon has asked him to do.

Helms has been given what amounts to budgetary control over all activities of what is euphemistically known as the intelligence community. The "community" is a major postwar industry, which spends about \$5 billion annually and employs about 75,000 people. The newest member of this community—which includes the CIA, the Department of State, the FBI, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and some other agencies and departments is the DIA or Defense Intelligence Agency, and this newest member is what Helms is being asked to do something about.

The newest member is also by far the largest. DIA's size, which results directly from the Pentagon's oversupply of officers, and its budget, which results directly from the Pentagon's ability to get money out of Congress, have been sources of jealousy at CIA ever since Robert McNamara won John Kennedy's approval for establishing the agency in contravention of the post-World War II concept of a central civilian-led intelligence agency.

But jealousy has now changed to real concern, and the concern has spread from CIA to the government's intelli-

gence users, chief of which is the President of the United States.

The DIA has more than once come up with failures. Some of the failures have been immediate spectaculars—as in the case of the prisoners at Sontay who weren't there, or the enemy headquarters in Cambodia which wasn't there either. Some of them have been delayed sur-

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prises such as the fantastic overestimates of enemy killed in action. To be sure, none of the failures has plunged the nation into cataclysm, but a wise President is bound to ask himself whether, if the DIA can be so wrong about prisoners, bodies and enemy intentions, it might not be wrong some day about Russian or Chinese missiles.

So the Helms job is to sit on top of DIA—not as its commander, but as a kind of guidance counselor—asking questions and suggesting areas of concern. In this last, he will have the help of a new committee of intelligence users, one of whose members will be Henry Kissinger. Presumably the committee will suggest priorities. Together with Helms' control of the budget, this power may be sufficient to eliminate information the government doesn't need, such as lists of people attending Earth Day activities as products of the intelligence effort and sources of Pentagon jobs.

But it sounds like a job for a head cracker, someone who is willing to cut, slash and run. On the record, Helms is not that type.

He began his career in CIA as a careful (some said overly cautious) manipulator of agents. He managed to stay in the top echelon while his peers were capturing the bubble reputation with

such exploits as the U-2 spy plane, and the ouster of Mossadegh in Iran and of Arbenz in Guatemala. He succeeded to the post of DDP or chief of the dirty tricks division when one of those peers came a cropper at the Bay of Pigs.

He is quiet, painstaking, fair-minded, suspicious of theory and an enemy of the flamboyant. "Under Dick Helms," a CIA veteran once remarked, "there would have been no Bay of Pigs. "But," he added, perhaps unfairly, "there would have been no U-2 either."

It may be that by quiet persistence, Helms can bring order into an intelligence establishment which has been in disorder since the DIA was created to do what the CIA was already doing. But if this is the way Helms intends to do the job, it will take the rest of his life.



RICHARD HELMS
Man on spot in Security