



The CIA Operation For Russian Sub

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THE SEMI-SUCCESS of the Central Intelligence Agency in dredging up a Russian sub from the bottom of the Pacific should give balance and sanity to the raging debate about this country's black operations. The episode shows dramatically that such operations can have a serious purpose which fully justifies secrecy.

It also demonstrates that other elements in the society, including the press, are prepared to treat matters of secret intelligence in a responsible way. It finally indicates that when events do force information out, the result isn't all that tragic.

Consider, first, the general reputation of the CIA. Recent events have made it seem a kind of post-graduate Ivy League playground where rich boys and girls spied on their countrymen between clumsy efforts to make and unmake foreign governments — preferably by assassination.

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THE AFFAIR of the Soviet sub works to right the balance. It involved possible recovery of Soviet code books and nuclear weapons, and was thus clearly an important and legitimate operation.

Secrecy was maintained for a long period — and appropriately so. National

security, this time, was genuinely at stake — not invoked as an excuse for covering up failure or impropriety.

Word of the affair began to circulate as an outgrowth of a crazy set of events. Finally the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times, which had stayed off the story at the request of the CIA, came out with full details.

The breaking of the secrecy has an undoubted cost. While one-third of the sunken sub was recovered in operations last summer, the code books and nuclear weapons were apparently not retrieved. The CIA had plans for a second effort this summer to raise the remains of the sub. That can no longer go forward without the Russians knowing it.

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THERE MAY also be a diplomatic cost. Security freaks in the Soviet Union will probably turn this episode to account in ways that will inhibit still more open exchange of people.

While Soviet vigilance — and the interest of those who promote it — may be heightened now, there is certainly no sign that the Russians are kissing off detente. On the contrary, all the evidence is that Party Secretary Leonid Brezhnev is more than ever committed to the policy of easing confrontation with the United States and Europe.