

The CIA in Laos

THE SENATE HAS WRUNG from the Central Intelligence Agency a public admission that this cloak-and-dagger agency is sustaining a force of 30,000 irregulars in the secret war waged in Laos for so long. While the full extent of the role of the CIA is still unrevealed, such specific information that has now been put on the record is appalling.

Even the Senate itself cannot tell how many millions the CIA is spending, because much of the money is hidden in budgets of other agencies. It is indicated, however, the CIA used about \$135 million last year to train, pay and supervise the Laotian "volunteers," as well as a force of perhaps 4800 Thai recruits.

Senator Symington, who forced the disclosure as chairman of a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee, believes the employment of Thai soldiers violates an antimercenary provision of the Defense Appropriations Act. "Not only are they breaking the law, but they intend to break it more," said the Senator.

IN 1962, THE TIMES OF LONDON first reported the CIA was dabbling in internal Laotian affairs, and since then there have been bits and dabs of information putting the CIA in an increasingly disenchanting role. The CIA admitted last year it had 1040 men there, but this seems meager for training and supervising an active fighting force of upwards of 30,000 men.

Senator Symington is intent on finding out whether the United States can organize, finance and help fight a war without officially acknowledging to Congress or the people. At the very least, he has already made a case for reining in the CIA. Its fumbling in the U-2 episode, its blundering in the Bay of Pigs, and now its activities in Laos, clearly state that the CIA should be confined to gathering and evaluating intelligence, and that it should be withdrawn from the field of military operations.