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Congress and the C.I.A.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee conducted hearings last week on a bill requiring the Central Intelligence Agency to provide the appropriate Congressional committees with the same intelligence analyses it regularly furnishes the White House. This legislation, introduced last year by Senator Cooper, ought to be expedited in the interests of strengthening the machinery of foreign policy.

As Congress reasserts its rightful role in the foreign policy process, it is essential that its members be as fully informed as possible. The respective Congressional committees are entitled to share the fruits of intelligence gathering operations for which the American taxpayer is billed up to \$6 billion annually. These fruits include assessments which sometimes sharply challenge Executive policies, as the Pentagon Papers revealed.

There is ample precedent for Senator Cooper's proposal. A former C.I.A. official testified last week that the agency has been furnishing highly classified intelligence on world atomic developments to the Joint Atomic Energy Committee for fifteen years, with no security breaches. Even now, senior agency officials provide oral briefings to other committees on request but only with White House approval. Congress could better discharge its own constitutional responsibilities in the foreign policy field if it had full and direct access to this information.

Beyond the Cooper bill, it is high time Congress revived its languishing effort to establish closer scrutiny of intelligence operations. In a move designed to sidetrack legislation with this aim, the Foreign Relations Committee in 1967 was invited to send three members to the C.I.A. joint briefings held by the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees, which are currently responsible for overseeing intelligence activities. But no meetings of this group were called during all of last year—an "oversight" of frightening dimensions.

It is not enough for Congress to know what the C.I.A. is saying. It is also essential that at least key members of the legislative branch, which provides the funds for worldwide intelligence-gathering and other undercover operations, keep informed about what, in general, this secret arm of the United States Government is doing.