

The Central Intelligence Agency's assignment is to further the security of the United States by learning as much as it can about the capabilities and intentions of potential foreign foes, the most powerful of which is the Soviet Union. It has been common knowledge for many years now—at least since an American U-2 plane was shot down over Siberia fifteen years ago—that both sides use the latest technological achievements to spy on each other.

Soviet and American intelligence satellites course through the skies daily taking incredibly sharp pictures of earth 100 miles or more below. The late Premier Khrushchev once even publicly offered to exchange Soviet spy satellite pictures for corresponding American photographs taken from space. The most effective modern intelligence agents are much more likely to be electronic engineers than Mata Haris.

It is against this background that the tale of the Glomar Explorer—the C.I.A. ship that masqueraded as the property of Howard Hughes—must be judged. The basic idea behind Project Jennifer—the code name used—was certainly imaginative: to locate and raise from the ocean bottom three miles deep a Soviet submarine that had sunk in 1968. After much behind-the-scenes debate, the decision to go ahead was taken; the Glomar Explorer was built and a specialized new technology was created; and then last year the attempt was made.

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This really brilliant effort unfortunately fell short of full success, though it is still a major technological feat that a substantial portion of the sunken Soviet submarine was brought to the surface. If the full submarine could have been recovered (and it still may be), it would have been a master intelligence accomplishment.

This complex and fascinating technological adventure demonstrates that, once again, American technology has brought a hitherto inaccessible environment into the ambit of man's future activity. It also underlines the need for a body of appropriate international law, so that economic activity—such as the deep sea mining the Glomar Explorer was allegedly engaged in—can be carried out in this new environment and future clashes of rival national interests and power can be avoided.

The story is, furthermore, a useful reminder of how essential good intelligence is for the national security in a world of nuclear weapons, nuclear submarines and hydrogen bomb-tipped intercontinental missiles. The C.I.A. is only to be commended for this extraordinary effort to carry out its essential mission.