

CIA

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U.S. Seeks To Lease Spy Ship

By David C. Martin
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Unable to find a use for the CIA's multimillion-dollar Glomar Explorer, the government is trying to lease the spy ship to private industry for deep-sea mining, according to industry and government officials.

But executives for two of the three corporations that government officials hoped might submit bids expressed no interest in the sophisticated vessel, which was used by the Central Intelligence Agency to recover part of a Soviet submarine from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

"It's a white elephant that just attracts attention," an executive for International Nickel Co. said of the ship, which was built under a secret agreement between the CIA and a corporation controlled by reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes.

"The possibilities [of leasing the Glomar] are quite minimal," said an executive for Deepsea Ventures, a Tennessee Inc. subsidiary.

Marne Dubs, head of Kennecott Copper Inc.'s deep-sea mining division, was the only executive queried by a reporter who seemed interested in the Glomar, calling it "probably the most important new ocean engineering tool that's been created in recent years."

Dubs added that Kennecott would make no final decision on whether to submit a bid for the Glomar until after the General Services Administration publishes bid requirements in the Federal Register.

The GSA currently is custodian of the Glomar. A GSA spokesman refused to confirm plans for the Glomar, but said leasing is "one of the propositions that we're kicking around."

A member of an inter-agency task force studying the Glomar said if private industry won't lease the ship, it will be put up for auction at a bargain price or sold for scrap. Either way, an official said, "it would be a pretty small return on the dollar for the taxpayer."

its home port in Long Beach worth \$60 million to \$70 million and that the government had indicated it would be willing to lease it for \$30,000 a day. The executive said that was "almost a giveaway rate" but that "the thing's just too big" for his firm's purposes.

He also said he opposed leasing the Glomar because of suspicions that the ship would still be under CIA contract, using deep-sea mining as a cover story while it continued to carry out spy missions.