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# Lying In State:

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By Anthony Lewis

In 1972 Cambridge Survey Research, public opinion analysts, asked people whether they agreed with this statement: "Over the last few years this country's leaders have consistently lied to the American people." Of those asked, 38 per cent agreed. A similar poll was taken in 1974, and 55 per cent agreed with the statement. This spring, 68 per cent agreed.

Those figures illuminate the obvious: To a dangerous degree, Americans have lost confidence in the word of their government. Such distrust may be endemic in other countries, but it is a relatively new phenomenon in the United States, and a corrupting one. Moreover, it persists even after the replacement of a President who made lying a way of life by one thought of as candid.

It is not hard to find reasons for the public feeling. One is that high officials who are caught out in crude deceptions so seldom pay any penalty. On the contrary, they remain in office and continue to be treated by much of official Washington as if they deserved respect.

An outstanding example of survival by deceivers is that of Richard Helms, the former director of Central Intelligence, now United States Ambassador to Iran. Reading back over some of

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the things Mr. Helms has said over the years arouses a feeling of awe for such mastery of the misleading.

On Feb. 7, 1973, Mr. Helms appeared before a closed session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for a hearing on his nomination as Ambassador. The transcript, subsequently published, includes the following exchanges with Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri:

Symington: "Did you try in the Central Intelligence Agency to overthrow the government of Chile?"

Helms: "No sir."

Symington: "Did you have any money passed to the opponents of Allende?"

Helms: "No sir."

Since that testimony, it has become known that the Nixon Administration authorized the C.I.A. to spend more

than \$5 million on covert activities in Chile between Allende's election as president in 1970 and his fall in 1973. The cash went to anti-Allende civic groups, newspapers, radio stations and others, with the aim of making it impossible for Allende to govern.

Mr. Helms has explained that he took Senator Symington's second question to refer to Allende's two actual "opponents" in the 1970 election—and the C.I.A. gave them no money. That is a strained argument, to put it mildly, since the first question was so clearly about the post-election period. And in any event, the C.I.A. did give \$500,000 to opposition party personnel during the 1970 election.

In the confirmation hearings, Senator Clifford Case of New Jersey mentioned the known use of Army intelligence to report on the anti-war movement. This exchange followed:

Case: "Do you know anything about any activity on the part of the C.I.A. in that connection? Was it asked to be involved?"

Helms: "I don't recall whether we were asked, but we were not involved because it seemed to me that was a clear violation of what our charter was."

The Rockefeller Commission has just reported that the C.I.A. under Mr. Helms set up a Special Operations Group to "collect information on dissident Americans." It ran Operation Chaos, infiltrating the anti-war movement and collecting on a computerized index "the names of more than 300,000

persons and organizations." Even by recent standards, of official untruth, Mr. Helms's "not involved" must set a record.

In the confirmation hearings Mr. Helms was also asked about any C.I.A. connection with E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, the convicted Watergate burglars. He said there had been no connection since Hunt retired from the agency in 1970. Later it was learned that the C.I.A. had supplied Hunt and Liddy with equipment for their burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in 1971. Mr. Helms explained that he thought the questions had related only to the Watergate break-in.

No one has called Mr. Helms effectively to account for his testimony. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the immediate victim of his deception, recalled him but asked unfocused and deferential questions. The Rockefeller Commission, comprehensive as its report was, said nothing about the lies that had allowed all those illegalities it found to flourish.

As for President Ford, at whose pleasure ambassadors serve, he has not been heard to murmur a critical word about Mr. Helms. The Government's failure to bring a particular perjury case may always be explained by technical or evidentiary problems. But anyone who wonders why Americans have grown cynical about those who govern them might think about this question: Why does Richard Helms still hold the rank of ambassador?