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AN INTERVIEW WITH SENATOR FRANK CHURCH

HAL WALKER: Senator Church, welcome again to Capitol Cloakroom. A Democrat from the state of Idaho, you came to the Senate in 1957; you're now serving your 18th year on Capitol Hill. Your name has been closely associated with the forces opposing the war in Vietnam. You're a co-author of the legislation which finally brought an end to American bombing in Cambodia by cutting off funds. You're an outspoken opponent of domestic gun control, and you currently head a committee on emergency powers which is investigating the question of concentrated powers in the Executive. Your other committee assignments include Interior and Insular Affairs and Foreign Relations.

On Foreign Relations, in light of recent disclosures of the CIA's involvement in the internal affairs of Chile, and stacked against State Department testimony to the contrary, what are the chances of perjury citations being brought against present and former State Department officials accused of misleading the Senate Foreign Relations Committee?

SENATOR FRANK CHURCH: That matter is under investigation now by the committee's staff, and the committee will meet soon to review the testimony, all of it, which heretofore has not been assembled for a review by the members. And then the committee will have to decide what action to take.

I can't forecast what that decision will be, but possible referral to the Justice Department, in appropriate cases, for perjury is one possibility, depending on whether or not the evidence will sustain it. Another is the possibility of citing certain witnesses that appeared before the committee earlier and gave sworn testimony that turns out to be untruthful for contempt of the Congress.

I think that this decision will have to be left to the committee, and I wouldn't want to prejudge it.

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WALKER: Well, Senator, do you feel that the American public now has complete information about the CIA's and America's role in Chile in the overthrow of the Allende government?

SENATOR CHURCH: No, I do not. So far, the revelations that have been made really constitute a long procession of prevarications, and every time a new cover story is developed, it's soon uncovered by later disclosure of new facts. And I'm not prepared to say that we know all the facts yet. I don't feel in my own heart that I've been told all of the truth about the extent of the American intervention in that country.

DANIEL SCHORR: Senator Church, covert activities traditionally have cover stories to go with them. Let's discuss the broader issue that's involved here. There has been a tradition set up in which there are competitive covert activities that have gone on between the Soviet Union and the United States. Are you against covert activities by the CIA?

SENATOR CHURCH: Yes, I'm very much against the kind of covert action that was taken in Chile. I'm not prepared to say that there could be no set of circumstances that would not justify covert action if the vital security interest, the safety of the American people or the avoidance of nuclear war or the survival of the country depended on it. Then, you know, you have to remove all restraints and do whatever can be done, including covert action.

So, I don't draw a hard-and-fast rule and say never. But on the other hand, what's been going on in Chile, and I'm afraid in other places, has been quite a different matter. There were no overriding security considerations in the case of Chile. And besides, we intervened there to bring down a government that had been constitutionally elected by the people of Chile. And you know the outcome of the whole bloody business is a military government imposed by force of arms, and the destruction of all freedom in Chile.

I just don't think that what we did there can possibly be reconciled with the principles that we normally stand for as a nation, including the right of self-determination of foreign peoples.

JOHN MEYER: Even with overriding security considerations, how can we, as a democracy, ever tolerate our meddling with the governments of other countries, covertly or otherwise?

SENATOR CHURCH: Well, as I say, the only circumstances that might possibly excuse such an action would be those intimately associated with our own national survival or the avoidance

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of a nuclear catastrophe, something of that kind. But in the normal course of our relations, we can't possibly justify such interventions as that which took place in Chile, nor can we reconcile them with the traditional principles we say we uphold. That includes the treaty laws that we have entered into, the solemn obligations we have taken by treaty. That includes all principles of international law of which I am familiar. These are all contrary to the covert action taken by the CIA in the case of Chile.

MEYER: But allowing that one exception you cite, doesn't that open the Pandora's Box to the sort of situation we see in Chile?

SENATOR CHURCH: Not if the CIA can be brought under effective restraint. If we go on, as we have in the past, assuming here on Capitol Hill that the Congress has no business knowing what the CIA is doing, if we go on, as we have in the past, appropriating money and not knowing how much is even being spent by the CIA, if we go on in the Congress wearing blinders, then we ought not to be surprised when from time to time we discover how far astray the CIA has gone.

And I know there are those who say, "Well, we must leave this up to the President." But it seems to me, in the light of abuses that have now been revealed, that the Congress can no longer shirk its responsibility to establish some sort of checkrein over the CIA.

SCHORR: Senator, we have been talking about the CIA. The evidence, however, is that the CIA acts on instruction from something called the 40 Committee, which is a high-level committee headed by the President's national security adviser. Are you not storming against the wrong door? The CIA, as far as I know, doesn't go off on operations on its own volition. It goes off carrying out actions which it's been instructed to do.

Isn't it a larger question of what our foreign policy is and what the administration is trying to do?

SENATOR CHURCH: Yes, it is a larger question, and I would hope that the Foreign Relations Committee, in addition to determining what action is appropriate where sworn testimony has been given to us that we later find to be wrong, to be untruthful, would proceed further and would examine the full implications of this kind of covert action to subvert and bring down a foreign government in the context of our overall foreign policy. I think that's a very important issue and we have to face it, and I hope that the Foreign Relations Committee will undertake a thorough study of this very question.

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SCHORR: Let me press you with one more question, because we've been talking in generalities about avoiding covert operations save for trying to prevent nuclear war, nuclear holocaust. But let's take oil and our present need for oil.

One of the operations with which the CIA was credited was helping to bring about the downfall of Premier Mossadegh in Iran and therefore perhaps saving for the -- what we call the Free World the oil supplies of Iran, which turn out to be rather useful right now.

Suppose, hypothetically -- maybe it's not so hypothetical -- that the 40 Committee is now mounting a contingency operation to make sure that we do not lose the oil resources of the Middle East. Would that be consistent with what you call our vital national security interest?

SENATOR CHURCH: Well first of all, let's look at the situation in the Middle East. We're being gouged to death by these oil-producing countries, including one government that you've just referred to that we once saved by covert operations. So I don't think the dividend has been all that grand. In fact these bloated oil prices are the principal cause for runaway inflation in the Western World that's carrying us to the brink of a very serious collapse.

Now the worst thing we could do under these circumstances is to start to tamper with one of these governments and then have it come, as it frequently does, and then face the general recriminations that would follow on the part of all the other governments in the Middle East. I would think that's the worst and the most risky possible thing to do under these circumstances.

What we should be doing is not playing around under the table, but playing above the table and telling these governments that we cannot tolerate prices that can wreck the economy of the Western World, and that we are prepared to retaliate in kind.

Take, for example, the aid bill that is presently before the Congress. It's hard for me to believe it; it's incredible, but that aid bill contains \$270 million which the Administration plans to give to OPEC countries, the very countries that have joined in this cartel, have hiked the price of petroleum 500%, and have said that they will reduce production in order to keep the price at that unrealistic level. I just can't imagine our doling out money to these very governments. It's just like pushing money in the pockets of a guy that's got you by the neck, strangling you.

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And I think that the way we must begin to deal with these countries is to prove to them that the President and the Secretary of State aren't simply jawboning when they talk about the disastrous effect of these prices, but that the Congress and the Administration is prepared to back this up by cutting off aid through our direct programs and through the loans of the international banks to which we have given the bulk of the money, and to make it clear that we're prepared to take further retaliatory action unless something is done about bringing down the price of oil.

WALKER: Beyond jawboning, do you have a legislative vehicle for doing that with regard to funds for the OPEC countries?

SENATOR CHURCH: Yes. I have offered an amendment in the Senate which would cut off all aid, both through our own aid agencies and, to the extent that we can influence it, through the multinational banks -- the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Asian Bank -- to all countries who are members of OPEC unless the President has first certified that the government in question is making a bona fide effort to bring down the price of oil.

WALKER: [Unintelligible] this winter? I mean wouldn't retaliation suggest that there's going to be less heating fuel for...

SENATOR CHURCH: We've got to begin to make choices, and one of the choices that faces us is complete economic collapse, with all of its dire consequences. Inflation is way out of control. It's the worst single problem that faces the American people.

Now are we going to continue to blink at it and let it get worse month by month until it brings down the major international banks? Already two have collapsed in Germany. One big bank has collapsed in this country.

[Interruption]

SENATOR CHURCH: ...of a very serious depression. The Western World has got to wake up. And I think that the time for jawboning has passed.

MEYER: The reaction of the Arab states which produce oil has been rather negative to the initial jawboning we've seen from the White House. If such legislation as you have suggested and other such actions should fail, the jawboning should fail, should a military solution be sought?

SENATOR CHURCH: A military solution is out of the question in the Middle East. In the first place, there

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is a confrontation there between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union has made it plain that it extends a measure of protection to the countries in the Middle East, certainly those countries that have arrayed against Israel. It provides them, as you know, with large quantities of military equipment and supplies. And given that situation, military intervention is not a matter that would pertain to one of these Arab sheikdoms or to a given oil-producing country of small size, but it's a matter that could easily ignite the Third World War.

SCHORR: That leads me to my next question. You are a great supporter of the policy of detente, which has been variously interpreted. But we have a policy called detente. Is that policy likely to survive in its present form under the pressures of both the oil crisis and the world food crisis?

SENATOR CHURCH: Well, I don't know. I would hope that it can survive because I don't see any other policy that makes any sense in terms of our relationship with the Soviet Union.

The economic crisis that has been brought on by these hijack oil prices is the direct result of a joint policy that the Arab governments and the other oil-producing governments have imposed upon the Western World.

SCHORR: In a sense, under the umbrella of the Soviet Union.

SENATOR CHURCH: It is in the sense that no military solution is feasible to this problem, and I'm suggesting that therefore we should look to ways that we can retaliate that will get the message across to these countries that this is far too serious a matter, that the Western World means what it says, and that if some good-faith negotiation does not occur to bring down these oil prices, then we are prepared to take actions to back up our words, and these are economic actions.

After all, we're faced with a kind of economic offensive against the Western World, and I think we can defend ourselves against such an offensive only by taking economic reprisals.

SCHORR: I'm not getting my question across. My question is on detente, and if detente today meant anything and we were faced with a possibility of a worldwide depression of what is happening in the oil-producing states, could we not legitimately expect to get some kind of cooperation from the Soviet Union instead of a deterrent from our taking any action?

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SENATOR CHURCH: I don't think that the Soviet Union worries too much about the problems of the Western World. Even a depression I don't think would concern them greatly unless they felt that they too would be drawn into the maelstrom.

I don't think that Russia looks at detente in terms of giving us affirmative help in solving our economic problems with other countries, like the Arab countries. Rather, detente to them means improved relations with the United States in terms of expanded trade, in terms of some progress in reducing the pace of the arms race and the danger that this poses to both the Soviet Union and the United States.

In other words, I think they look at detente as a bilateral thing between the United States and the Soviet Union, and they measure it in what action these two countries can take in solving the serious problems that face us due to arms and that kind of thing.

SCHORR: But is it bilateral? I mean we had -- detente had reached a certain peak. When the October War came, there was a worldwide American alert directed at the Soviet Union because of what was happening in the Middle East. Now how can you consider detente bilateral?

SENATOR CHURCH: Well, I consider it -- I said I thought the Russians looked at detente in this way, and I think that's so.

As far as their action in the Middle East is concerned, it was certainly not friendly action, yet the Secretary of State has said that they did restrain themselves. The confrontation was avoided, and that in the end, though they didn't help us in our negotiations to secure the disengagement agreements that now exist between Israel, Egypt and Syria, they also did not make an effort to block those negotiations.

SCHORR: ...count our small blessings.

SENATOR CHURCH: So those are small blessings indeed, but one can look back on the earlier period of the Cold War when the Russians would have been much more aggressive in blocking actions of this kind. To that degree, I think there was a little bit of fallout of detente on the Middle East. It's not much, but it's something.

MEYER: You sit on the Subcommittee on Arms Control of the Foreign Relations Committee. What is your opinion of what appears to be a pouring of U.S. arms into the Middle Eastern countries, the OPEC countries?

SENATOR CHURCH: Well, I think it's very unfortunate, but I don't see any way to stop it. These countries are anxious

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to purchase arms. The price that they're selling oil for is so high that all of the balance of payments of the Western countries have gone into serious deficit. And I think that as a result, the United States will sell arms in order to buy oil. And if we don't, the English, the French, the Germans will. And I suspect that in the end, all of these Western countries will be selling arms into the Middle East.

I think it's one of the tragedies that is the direct result of this situation.

MEYER: Doesn't history teach that catastrophe is the end result of such massive arms sales?

SENATOR CHURCH: Yes, history does teach that massive arms buildups usually lead to war. The countries of the Middle East have not learned that lesson, but then neither have we. What are we engaged in today but a tremendous arms race that our best efforts have yet not been able to check.

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