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DISCUSSION OF THE CIA

HUGH SIDEY: Carl, if I read the signs right, the CIA is undergoing some internal stress and change now. It appears that at least some of the people want to get out of the operation of subverting foreign governments, the cloak and dagger operations. They want to confine themselves to more pure intelligence gathering. And certainly there are a lot of people on the outside that want that.

You as a member of that Committee of Forty that made, at one time, those important decisions -- Peter [Lisagor] wants me to ask you how many foreign governments you helped subvert in your time and whether you think it's a good thing.

[Laughter.]

CARL ROWAN: Well, I'll say this. I was in on some decisions that I'm sure affected the internal affairs of a lot of other countries. And this is one of the really grave questions a society like yours faces from time to time: how much morality can you infuse into your foreign policy? We find that we talk a lot of morality. We embrace that U. N. statement that we don't interfere in the internal affairs of other sovereign states, but everybody goes on interfering, and we wind up justifying it on the basis that this is a mean, wicked, wretched world, and because all the other big countries are doing it, we're going to go ahead and do it. And I will almost guarantee you that when all the shouting has died down in this particular case, you'll find the CIA doing much the same kinds of things that it's been doing since the beginning.

SIDEY: Well, should that -- should that go on? What's your feeling?

ROWAN: Some of the things they should do. There are some things where I draw the line.

SIDEY: What about Chile?

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ROWAN: I, for example, do not believe that we have the right to try to upset Chile's economy to the extent that the natives even would become restless and throw the Allende regime out. And I'm not so sure that that's where it stopped.

In fact, you can make a real argument as to whether what President Ford has admitted we did was all right. What do you think would have happened in this country if, during the '72 election, Mr. Nixon had discovered that some other government was putting money in the coffers of the McGovern campaign and into the treasury of certain newspapers that were opposed to Mr. Nixon?

PETER LISAGOR: There was that suspicion....

ROWAN: I know there was.

LISAGOR: ...about the Cubans.

ROWAN: And this is what makes it difficult, you see.

SIDEY: All right. Jack, you as an old cloak and dagger man....

JAMES J. KILPATRICK: Oh, look, I'm all in favor of what went on in Chile. But I want to discuss this. You talk about upsetting the economy of Chile by the various measures that were taken. Suppose we give a two billion dollar foreign aid cheap loan or an outright grant to a country. Doesn't that affect its economy?

ROWAN: No question about it. Now, for example, Jack, here is where I was trying to draw the line between the kinds of things the Forty Committee decides on. You get an intelligence report saying the Cubans are putting sixty guerrillas into Boliva. The government there wants some helicopters. They want some counterinsurgency help from the CIA. So we vote to give them that kind of help.

Now, I don't have any trouble with that kind of decision. But I do have difficulty with a decision whereby Allende wins in a popular election and becomes President, and then we maneuver to see that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, all the other instruments of international credit put the screws on Chile, you see, to throw out an elected government.

LISAGOR: Yes, but hold on. Suppose the government of Boliva to whom we sent money to help against the imported Castro guerrillas -- suppose that was a dictatorial, repressive, autocratic government. Would you not have trouble with that, Carl?

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ROWAN: Yes. Then you've got another moral, another different kind of moral dilemma. And this is why I'm saying there is no way you can sit down and make a categorical statement about what the CIA can or cannot do.

LISAGOR: What would be wrong, though, if the CIA were to confine itself to gathering intelligence?

ROWAN: Well, that may be what we come to.

LISAGOR: I mean what would be wrong with that? I understand that there are people in the CIA now who believe that as long as they do a good, first rate job of gathering intelligence, that will be enough, that you don't have to engage in these covert dirty tricks, political operations.

ROWAN: All right. I'll give you one example of the kind of thing that might come up, Peter. Let's say we adopt that. And I can accept it on moral grounds. But somebody then says we happen to know that in Ghana -- just to use an example -- the Soviet Union has put three million bucks in there. They're bribing politicians, et cetera, et cetera....

LISAGOR: Right. Okay.

ROWAN: And then somebody says if we don't put three million in and bribe some of our politicians, it's going to become a communist government. Well, what do you do then, you see?

SIDEY: Let's hear from George here on this.

GEORGE WILL: Well, let's be clear about a couple of things. First of all, we shouldn't exaggerate our ability to subvert governments at will. The idea that the CIA is uniquely competent to achieve what it does, unique among all our government institutions, is, I think, unrealistic.

Second, the Allende economic policies -- he was a true-blue socialist -- were quite capable of alienating and eventually radicalizing the middle classes and eventually would have got him thrown out....

LISAGOR: So we wasted our dough.

WILL: More than likely, as usual.

Third, I'm reluctant to talk about this because one can't talk about this without coming close to criticizing Dr. Kissinger. And the storm signals are up again that if this gets out of hand, this criticizing of him, he'll take his bat and ball and go home. And I don't want to be blamed for that.

But, fourth, I would like to make the following

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curious observation about Dr. Kissinger. For the last year, Senator Jackson and comfortable majorities in both houses of the Congress have rallied behind a piece of legislation that would have denied American subsidies essentially for the Soviet economy unless and until the Soviet Union liberalized its emigration policies. Dr. Kissinger has denounced this as interfering in the internal affairs of another country. Having paused in his denunciations, he goes into one of these Committee of Forty meetings and goes about meddling in the internal affairs of Chile. And I would like an explanation of how he draws the line on what internal affairs it's all right to meddle in.

SIDEY: Jack -- Jack is going to give you an explanation.

KILPATRICK: ...consistency or morality out of Dr. Kissinger of any government, are you? I've never seen any signs of consistent morality or consistent consistency.

WILL: Yes, that's what I'm asking for.

KILPATRICK: But that's too much.

LISAGOR: But what about the argument -- and I ask you this more in the devil's advocate sense, George -- but what about the argument that our national interests are served in both cases?

KILPATRICK: By intervening and by not intervening.

LISAGOR: Yes, right.

WILL: Well, if they are served in both cases, then he has to justify each policy in terms of the national interest, not in terms of a principle....

LISAGOR: Oh, that's right.

WILL:of nonintervention....

LISAGOR: Well, that use of the word "principle" will render us all speechless here.

SIDEY: Yes, but I see another element in this, don't you, gentlemen, in simply the fact that it's impossible for the CIA in this world, with communication as it is and the state of our open government, to carry on this kind of operation as they have in previous administrations.

LISAGOR: You know, George says that it's not very effective. Maybe it isn't any more. But we knocked over quite a few governments, the CIA did, in its time -- Guatemala

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and Iran.

SIDEY: Are we better off for it?

LISAGOR: What?

SIDEY: Are we better off for it?

LISAGOR: Well, I don't know. I suspect they think we are. Maybe we actually are. In Guatemala, we have -- what do we have there? In Iran we have the Shah back in power after Mossadegh put the clamps on the oil production during his time, which is why I think the CIA went in there in the first place. The problem here with this is that, in the end, as I think Bill Buckley has suggested, we'll have to ask the CIA to go into Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and see that those oil spigots are turned out, unless we want to send the Marines in there, to meet your primary concern, George.

SIDEY: Wait a minute. Carl's turn.

ROWAN: ...One point I think we ought to re-emphasize again. We talk about the CIA. And anytime this comes up, CIA, the initials, become a big bugaboo. But I just want to point out as one who sat on that committee that I don't know of anything the CIA did during my years there that did not have the approval of the secretary of State and the President of the United States and, if the congressional oversight committees had been on the ball, their approval too. Now, one of the problems is, I think, that the congressmen sit on their duffs and don't carry out their proper or assigned roles of oversight. But the CIA is doing nothing but carrying out things that our elected leaders say are in the national interest of this country. And that's how it's going to be.

SIDEY: Well, let's change from that to a domestic problem....

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[The discussion at this point turns to the matter of former President Nixon's health.]

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