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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE TO
STUDY GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS WITH
RESPECT TO INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES

(PURSUANT TO S. RES. 21, 94TH CONGRESS)

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

November 4, 1975

Dear Mr. President:

I have received your letter of October 31, 1975, urging the Select Committee to withhold from the public its report on the assassination investigation which has been conducted over the past six months.

Yesterday afternoon the Committee, after unanimously approving the report itself, discussed your letter. The Committee respectfully disagreed with your suggestion that the report be suppressed and voted to hold to the decisions it had reached and announced several months ago. Accordingly, once the report has been printed, the Committee intends to make its contents public after first disclosing them to the full Senate.

In my view, the national interest is better served by letting the American people know the true and complete story. A basic tenet of our democracy is that the people must be told of the mistakes of their government so that they may have the opportunity to correct them.

Early in its deliberations, the Committee gave considerable thought to the contention you now advance that the report should be suppressed because it might embarrass this country abroad. We believe that foreign peoples will, upon sober reflection, admire our nation more for keeping faith with our democratic ideals than they will condemn us for the misconduct itself. Moreover, whatever the possible short-term detriment to our reputation abroad, it will be far outweighed by the constructive result at home of enabling the American people to fully understand what was done secretly in their name. Revealing the truth will strengthen our political system, which depends upon an informed public, and will help reestablish the trust of the American people in the candor of their government. On the

Photocopy from Gerald R. Ford Library

Ford Papers: President's Handwriting File; Nat'l Security Series, b. 31, f. 1 "Intel (7)."

other hand, suppressing the report would only further erode public confidence.

Examining the question of disclosure in the light of what has already been publicly revealed about America's involvement in assassination attempts makes the case for disclosure even more compelling. Indeed, the public record, including your urgings that this Committee investigate assassination attempts, renders it unrealistic, in my judgment, even to contemplate suppressing the facts.

The public record already contains many statements about alleged United States involvement in assassination attempts which, in some cases, are fragmentary and misleading and, in other cases, simply untrue. The American people have been led to believe that they will learn the whole truth about these allegations. The Committee is convinced that a full, fair, and factual account must be made public.

This winter, in the course of discussing the prospective work of the Rockefeller Commission, you took official note of allegations of United States involvement in assassinations and asked the Commission to investigate some of them. Toward the end of the Commission's work and shortly thereafter, certain members of that Commission publicly stated their views on the allegations. It was concluded, however, that the report which the Commission had prepared to make public was "incomplete". Accordingly, you asked this Committee to carry forward the investigation of assassination.

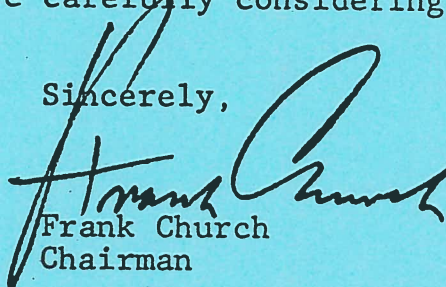
The Committee accepted the responsibility. We examined over 100 witnesses in executive session. Some members of the Committee advanced powerful arguments for conducting the examination in public. However, the Committee decided that, on balance, it was preferable to issue a comprehensive written report after it had obtained and analyzed all the evidence. It has long been clear that the Committee intended to issue such a report.

In addition to disclosing the truth about the assassination charges, a comprehensive report serves a further legislative purpose. By examining the underlying facts in great detail, the report will create the basis for an informed public debate on whether there has been an unsound system of secret government. The issue is whether that system created

the risk of confusion, rashness and irresponsibility in the very areas where clarity and sober judgment are most necessary. Such a debate is essential to lay the basis for legislation designed to change institutional arrangements that made particular misdeeds possible. Unless that is done, the same shortcomings may lead to similar mistakes in the future.

With respect to your second point, we intend to be scrupulous in avoiding any inadvertent injury to particular persons. We had previously asked officials of the State Department, Defense Department, and CIA to review the report for the limited purpose of identifying to us any points in that connection that occurred to them. A number of useful comments were made and we are carefully considering them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Frank Church", is written over the typed name and title.

Frank Church
Chairman

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.