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Provenance:

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Person:

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With respect to assassination, my position is clear. I just think it is wrong. And I have said so and made it very clear to my subordinates. (5/21/75, p. 89)

Colby's predecessor, Helms, although himself involved in an earlier plot, said he had concluded assassination should be ruled out for both moral and practical reasons:

As a result of my experiences through the years, when I became Director I had made up my mind that this option...of killing foreign leaders, was something that I did not want to happen on my watch. My reasons for this were these:

There are not only moral reasons but there are also some other rather practical reasons.

It is almost impossible in a democracy to keep anything like that secret.... Somebody would go to a Congressman, his Senator, he might go to a newspaper man, whatever the case may be, but it just is not a practical alternative, it seems to me, in our society.

Then there is another consideration...if you are going to try by this kind of means to remove a foreign leader, then who is going to take his place running that country, and are you essentially better off as a matter of practice when it is over than you were before? And I can give you I think a very solid example of this which happened in Vietnam when President Diem was eliminated from the scene. We then had a revolving door of prime ministers after that for quite some period of time, during which the Vietnamese Government at a time in its history when it should have been strong was nothing but a caretaker government....In other words, that whole exercise turned out to the disadvantage of the United States.

...there is no sense in my sitting here with all the experience I have had and not sharing with the Committee my feelings this day. It isn't because I have lost my cool, or because I have lost my guts, it simply is because I don't think it is a viable option in the United States of America these days.

Chairman Church. Doesn't it also follow, Mr. Helms ... I agree with what you have said fully ... but doesn't it also follow on the practical side, apart from the moral side, that since these secrets are bound to come out, when they do, they do very grave political damage to the United States in the world at large? I don't know to what extent the Russians