

kgo-am, San Francisco
ABC network, presidential press conference
Excerpts, Ford on reopening assassination
investigations, transcribed from tape

26 November 1975
[main topic, aid to NY]

✓ CIA (D)

Q -- In view of recent revelations, are you fully satisfied that you're aware of everything that the CIA does, since you became President, and do you accept full responsibility ?

A -- Miss Thomas, I certainly hope that I'm fully aware of everything the CIA is doing. I can assure you that if I'm not fully informed, I will welcome any information that people may have that I don't know about. But I have specifically asked for all information that I think I need concerning matters of the CIA.

Q -- [same questioner] Can you say what steps you are taking to guarantee that the American people will never again learn that a federal agency plotted on the life of a foreign leader or tried to defame a domestic leader like Martin Luther King ?

A -- I have issued specific instructions to the U.S. intelligence agencies that under no circumstances should any agency in this government, while I'm President, participate in or plan for any assassination of a foreign leader. Equally emphatic instructions have gone to any domestic agency of the federal government and/or the CIA or intelligence agencies that they should not violate the law involving the right of privacy of any individual in the United States.

Q -- Mr. President, the Senate Intelligence Committee has documented widespread efforts by the FBI to discredit Dr. Martin Luther King before he was assassinated, as you know. And I just wonder, do you think the federal government -- ~~you have any responsibility~~ and you, as President -- have any responsibility now to see that those who were responsible for that are either purged from government service -- if they still are in government service -- or prosecuted if the statute of limitations has not run out on them ?

A -- I certainly condemn those actions which were taken regarding Martin Luther King. I think it's abhorrent to all Americans, including myself. Whether or not we can identify the individuals -- if they are still alive -- is difficult. But I certainly will talk to the attorney general regarding that matter.

Q -- [same questioner] You think an effort should be made, ~~though~~ though, to identify those people ?

OYER

A -- I think so.

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Q -- In view of the Congressional report on the CIA and recent testimony about FBI activities, and continuing doubt in the country, don't you think it would be in the national interest to reopen the assassination investigation of President Kennedy and now Martin Luther King as well ?

A -- I, of course, served on the Warren Commission, and I know a good deal about the hearings and the Committee's report, obviously. There are some new developments -- not evidence -- but new developments that, according to one of our best staff members -- who's kept up to date on it more than I -- that he thinks just to lay those charges aside that a new investigation ought to be undertaken. He at the same time said that no new evidence has come up. If those particular developments could be fully investigated, without reopening the whole matter that took us ten months to conclude, I think some responsible group or organization ought to do so, but not to reopen all of the other aspects because I think they were thoroughly covered by the Warren Commission.

Q -- [same questioner] Are you prepared then to take that step on the part of the administration, to appoint a task force -- from the Justice Department, say -- to look into the new developments, and to report on those as well, or would you rather have it done by an independent organization ?

A -- I think, in light of my former membership on the Warren Commission, it might be better by somebody other than I appoint.

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CIA

Q -- A follow-up question if I could, Mr. President, to the area statement on the Central Intelligence Agency. As you know, there is a gray area in which the CIA might take an action which could eventually lead to danger or the assassination of a political leader. Now in your first news conference you indicated that you supported such covert activities, particularly in the case of Chile. Do you still support those activities, and if so what kind of philosophy should the constitutional democracy of America take [word garbled] ? [interest ?]

A -- Under this administration, no agency of the federal government will plan or participate in any assassination plot of a foreign leader. The United States, however, in many cases, for its own protection, its own national security, must undertake foreign covert operations, but I'm not gonna discuss the details of it.

Q -- [same questioner] Will you allow the country to involve itself in situations which could potentially be dangerous to other leaders ?

A -- The people in the intelligence agencies know what my instructions are. If they violate them, the proper action will be taken.

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