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ITT in Chile: Sign of an End To Cold War?

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Rather than just being unnerved by the revelations of ITT's misadventures in Chile, maybe we ought to go on to hail the case as the best real proof we've had so far of the end of the cold war.

For while the CIA was evidently dabbling with ITT on the theory that a Marxist government in Chile might pose some kind of political or strategic disadvantage to the United States, ITT saw the prospect of an Allende victory for what it was to ITT: a kick in the wallet.

Faithful old cold-warhorse John McCone, the former CIA director who'd signed on as a director to ITT, may have conceived of ITT's attempt to purchase a million dollars' worth of subversion from the CIA as an anti-Communist act tracing its lineage to the Berlin Airlift. That's what he told the Senate Foreign Relations multinational corporations subcommittee investigating the affair.

But Harold Geneen, president of ITT, seems to have had no similar illusions or divided loyalties. Not for him to make the claim that what's bad for ITT is bad for the country: he went to CIA as a businessman worried that Allende's election would hurt his firm.

In 1964 the CIA had played its part (still undetailed publicly) in a multifaceted American effort to help elect Eduardo Frei. Frei's Christian Democrats, who won, were then widely seen as the "last best hope" for setting a model of change for all of Latin America — an orderly reformist model congenial both to American political interests as then conceived and to American economic interests as still conceived.

In 1964, however, it seems fair to say in retrospect, the United States was still in the grip of two powerful ideas whose hold was to weaken through the decade to come. The first idea was that Fidel Castro—socialist, subversive, allied to Moscow—was a live menace requiring some response by Washington. The second was that it was within the capacities of the United States to steer events in a foreign country—in Chile no less than Vietnam—in a direction and pace of its own choosing.

Few would now argue that these two ideas have the same hold on policy. Cuba is not perceived as a menace (or testing ground) of the old dimensions. This country's confidence in its own special talent for controlling change

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elsewhere has diminished. This may help explain why, when the U.S. government contemplated the election of a Chilean Marxist in 1970, some of the old political-strategic juices may have flowed but finally what was done was demonstrably short of what was needed to keep Allende from power.

Did ITT sense the implications of the change even before the U.S. government? In 1964, by its own account, ITT offered money to the CIA for the CIA's political purposes in Chile. In 1970, ITT offered money to the CIA for its own economic purposes. In the interval, the corporation perhaps thought, the world had been made safe for precisely the sort of old-fashioned economic imperialism—corporations expecting their government to help them make money—that had gone out of style in the decades of the cold war.

The very premise of the Church subcommittee's look at ITT-CIA was that there is no longer an overarching national security reason *not* to look. One cannot imagine, for instance, a Senate committee looking three years after 1964, or even now, at what the CIA may have been up to in Chile in 1964. Nor could one imagine, in an earlier period, that the CIA would let its director, plus its top hand for dirty tricks in Latin America, testify before a Senate committee.

I am familiar with the "revisionist" argument that American foreign policy, not only before World War II, but afterwards, was dominated essentially by considerations of commerce: winning raw materials, markets, investment privileges, and the like. The argument seems to be persuasive only to people who are already socialists or Marxists. My own view is that "political" considerations of power, status and fear were the stuff of the cold war.

Granted, the notion that the world may now again be safe or ripe for old-fashioned economic imperialism is a rather inflated conclusion to draw from the relatively slender findings of the Senate inquiry into ITT. Nor can it possibly be what everybody had in mind when they hoped that superpower relations would begin to mellow. It would seem to be, nonetheless, one of the possibilities deserving further scrutiny as we all strain to see what lies on the far side of the cold war.