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SUBJECT Interview With George Bush

ANNOUNCER: Agronsky at Large. Tonight, a conversation with the former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Bush.

MARTIN AGRONSKY: Good evening. In this capital city, knowledge is the power. And that's what makes any man who's the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the CIA, the possessor of an awesome power.

In world crises, the Director knows what the President of the United States knows, and he knows it as soon as, or sometimes even before the President does, because that's his job.

George Bush was Director of the CIA for a year until January 20th. He was appointed by President Ford after having represented the U.S. in Communist China. He served Richard Nixon first as U.S. Ambassador, and he was Chairman of the Republican National Committee during Watergate -- served Mr. Nixon loyally into Watergate -- forced Nixon to resign.

Mr. Bush, when you took your seat as Director of the CIA, did you find that the world looked like much more dangerous place from there than you had anticipated?

GEORGE BUSH: Not immediately, Martin, but as one looks at the totality of the information, I do feel that it was -- it's more dangerous in some ways than I thought when I went there. On the other, I think that there are some real opportunities now to make the world more peaceful.

But, yes, I am concerned, and have been concerned about the -- some of the trouble spots in the world. I'm concerned about

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some of the intentions of the Soviet Union, for example, but not alarmingly so.

AGRONSKY: Well, tell me. When you went down to brief the President -- you spent some hours with him in Plains, Georgia, -- Mr. Carter before, actually, he took office. Did you outline the trouble spots in the world, and if you're not revealing any confidential information, could you lay them out for me?

BUSH: Well, I wouldn't want to go into the substance of what we base the now-President on, but I had five sessions with him, three rather long, intensive briefings in which we covered not only the trouble spots and the kind of current intelligence, you might call it, that also covered the most sensitive aspects of the business that the President must know about, it's the sources and methods, part of the business. But obviously, and of course President Carter is now addressing himself to it, the whole of question of the Soviet trip, the question of where we stand vis-a-vis the Soviet Union is the main thing. And any review of that nature, of course, we talk about the Peoples Republic of China and how it fits into the -- to the world.

AGRONSKY: Let's take a brief...

BUSH: ...we talk about that for [words inaudible], so I don't think I'm betraying a confidence in saying that these subjects were all touched on in considerable detail.

AGRONSKY: Now let's return to the Russian situation, the position of the United States vis-a-vis the Soviet Union in terms of strategic superiority.

When you were the Director you brought in that famous Team-B, that is, outside experts make an analysis of the position of the United States versus the Soviet Union?

BUSH: Yes.

AGRONSKY: What was the conclusion of Team-B?

BUSH: Well, Team-B, again the conclusion per se, is classified, but the Team-B took -- and you've seen some smidgens of the order of things they looked at -- they didn't do a full national intelligence estimate. They looked at Soviet strategic objective. And they took a, what you might say was a harder line view, indeed they took a more -- well, their view was that there was more superiority with -- Soviet superiority, if not upon us, was much closer.

So it was in this range of how far advanced the Soviets are, this Team-B did it's thing. But again, I don't want to go into the details of it. I'm furious with those who took an intelligence experiment and kind of went public with parts of it. And I don't

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want to be in there.

AGRONSKY: Let's get it down to this which has been made public. The retiring Air Force Intelligence Chief, General Keagan, contended the Soviets were ahead. And along came the Joint Chiefs of Staff and said, no, the Soviets are not ahead in terms of strategic superiority over all. Which is right?

BUSH: Well, I -- I don't know which is right, but my own personal view is that the Joint Chiefs' position is the position that certainly the one that I would support.

AGRONSKY: All right. Now this in effect is what you told the President.

BUSH: Well, again, I'm not going to get into what I told the President. The national intelligence estimate over which I presided -- I presided over it being put together -- and it -- it does preserve, Martin, a diversity of opinion. Intelligence is not as objective as one would think, or where can reach objective conclusions. And when you get into what someone else intends to do, there is room for difference of opinion.

But I feel comfortable with what I saw in the statement, and I haven't read the full text of what the Joint Chiefs provided, if they provided anything ....

AGRONSKY: All right.

BUSH: But what I saw publicly is the ...

AGRONSKY: You are not concerned then that the United States -- that the security of this country is in jeopardy vis-a-vis the Soviet Union?

BUSH: I think we're strong and must stay strong. And I think that when you heard the outgoing Secretary of Defense talk about equivalence, or talk about where we stood, you read this to the Joint Chiefs, I think that's fairly comforting for now. But there are, as I said publicly when I was Director, worrisome signs. And I have enough confidence in the military and in the State Department and in our new President to think that they know what these signs are, and that they will be careful about those signs and they'll watch them very closely. And the CIA will be providing the kind of information to make them watch them closely.

AGRONSKY: All right. Now you have repeatedly used the phrase, "worrisome signs" in terms of what you see down the road developing or evolving in the Soviet Union vis-a-vis the United States. Could you tell me without violating any confidence, what those worrisome signs are?

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BUSH: That's the problem. I'm dealing in an area where I am not able for valid security reasons, and they are valid in my opinion. I argue with some friends in the press as to whether -- how much classification we should have. But my concept is, I have to leave it that, "worrisome signs" because I don't want to go in and violate what is left of my security agreement. I'm simply not going to do that.

AGRONSKY: Suppose I try it this way.

BUSH: Well you can try, but you may not get very far.

AGRONSKY: All right, I'll try. Specifically, do you think that the development of the Soviet Navy and what you know about its plans for the future indicate that they will have naval superiority over the United States?

BUSH: Well, I can quote for you an article written by my successor-to-be, Admiral Turner, which talks about the Soviet Navy and trends in the Soviet Navy. And I can't answer whether they'll have superiority because that depends on what our policy -- not the intelligence -- our policy is going to be in terms of developing our Navy.

From what I know of our plans -- and again I don't have access to what the new Administration plans to do, -- I don't see the that they will achieve overall superiority, provided we vote funds that we need to keep a strong Navy. And I'd answer the same thing for conventional forces or aid or whatever...

AGRONSKY: Well, considering the funds that are now committed to the development of our Navy, are you concerned?

BUSH: Well, again I'm not -- I'm not -- no, I am not concerned provided the -- with the Joint Chiefs' view and with the view of those in the intelligence community being adequately considered, I think the Administration demonstrates it's going to do the right thing. Now that's a broad, general answer, but I -- the President, the ex-Naval office, he knows the importance of sea power, and I just don't see ourselves getting into a position where we're going to weaken ourselves.

But that doesn't mean they won't have more of one kind of ship or we have to have greater numbers in every category.

AGRONSKY: Okay. How about in missiles?

BUSH: Well, missiles again. I mean, in some things as the Joint Chiefs pointed out publicly, they're ahead of us, and then in other things we're...

AGRONSKY: In balance, you're not concerned.

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BUSH: Well, I accept the conclusions of the -- of Don Rumsfeld. When he left office he made some public statements about it, and I think that, plus the state -- recent statement of the Chiefs really accurately reflects where we stand.

AGRONSKY: So you do not see the United States as being in jeopardy in terms of security vis-a-vis the Soviet Union?

BUSH: At this moment?

AGRONSKY: With the qualifications that you've named.

BUSH: That's right. I accept and endorse the position that was put forward by the Joint Chiefs, my personal position, but I am concerned about things -- I hate to be mysterious -- that I am not at liberty to discuss on your very penetrating show here, but they must be watched. And it's not an opinion of a Team-B, or an opinion of -- most analysts in the intelligence community feel this way. There are signs that trouble them, and these -- the intelligence community -- I'm confident under the leadership of Admiral Turner, will continue to look at it.

AGRONSKY: You're going to drive me up the wall, you keep talking about these worrisome signs and you won't say what they are.

BUSH: Well, that's the part of the problem, Martin, the overall problem that I faced as Director. There's just a lot of things you can't talk about, and that makes you look less than forthcoming. But unfortunately you cannot run a foreign intelligence business in the sunshine, letting all the light in. There are things where we would be denied information if others knew the extent of our information on a certain topic. So that is part of the problem any Director of Central Intelligence faces -- or former Director, if he's going to adhere to what he must.

AGRONSKY: You are in an exceptionally good position to evaluate the kind of man who would be Director from your own experience as Director. Do you think that the President was mistaken, Mr. Carter was mistaken, when he nominated Mr. Sorenson to be Director, and of course the opposition was such that Sorensen withdrew.

BUSH: Well, I wouldn't want to say he was mistaken, but I expect he feels he was if the man was not confirmed. I know, however, that when I was nominated, there was a great furor. I had been active in politics and some -- I sat through some rather grueling hearings. And a lot of people took a lot of shots at me. But I didn't -- maybe it's my ego, but I didn't take it too personally, and I took the heat on it and was confirmed. And the minute I walked into that community, I never felt people were holding back on me or -- and yet I understand there was plenty of question and plenty of doubt in people's minds.

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So my thesis is that had Mr. Sorensen been confirmed he would have been supported. I don't believe this stuff that no outsider can be supported inside.

AGRONSKY: Let me ask you this. Had you been in the position to vote on Mr. Sorensen's confirmation or to advise the President if he asked you about...

BUSH: Now that's too tough a question. You're going to get me into personalities and I don't want to do that. Let's talk about the new nominee -- and I don't know how I would have voted. I would have wanted answers to the very questions they were asking. In my talks with Ted Sorensen, I think he should have answered those questions to the satisfaction of the Senate.

AGRONSKY: Well...

BUSH: If I'd been in the Senate which I wasn't in, I expect I would have said fine. But those questions never really got answered.

AGRONSKY: Let me help you there. One of the questions that was raised was that Sorensen had taken position as a conscientious objector -- not that he was not willing to serve in the Armed Forces, but he would serve with a weapon on the battlefield in the Armed Forces. He was willing to serve, for example, as a first-aid corpsman, or whatever that might be.

Do you think a man who was a conscientious objector in principle could have done the job?

BUSH: I think had he been able to answer the questions, which I'm satisfied from talking to him he could have done, that would have been put on that very sensitive subject, and answered them openly, and thus in position on events that might occur in the future, I'm satisfied he would have kept his word and done the job.

He discussed that with people prior to the hearings. So I don't think that would have proved to be an insurmountable stumbling block, but it certainly proved to be a matter of enormous concern. Where he would have to take position and publicly state what he would do under the kinds of trying hypothesis that you've put...

AGRONSKY: Listen, when you're the Director of the CIA, do you ever get into a position where in effect you have to order the kind of an action which could result in someone being killed?

BUSH: I think sometimes, when you're dealing in -- with clandestinity and to some degree covert action, which is a much smaller part of our overall operations than people think. But when you're dealing with spying and you're dealing with people

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secretly gathering information, there are those kinds of decisions -- and they're tough decisions. And one of the problems I had -- you know a father of a lot of kids and sensitive to morality, I hope, in public life, is how do you rationalize some of the things. And it's not all that tough, I mean it's not that many decisions, but there are those kinds of decisions I think the people that serve in intelligence have come down on the proper conclusion; that we must do certain things, we're in that kind of a world. And it's better to do it than fighting with guns someplace.

AGRONSKY: All right. Mr. Bush, is the CIA still in the assassination business?

BUSH: No. It should not be, and is not. And I don't know of any case where the CIA ever assassinated anyone. I know of the plots that came up, President Ford strongly supported legislation against, you know, assassination attempts, and I don't think it's gone very far...

AGRONSKY: Well, the CIA was instructed and contemplated killing Castro. It contemplated assassinating Lamumba.

BUSH: But didn't do it.

AGRONSKY. But didn't do it. So ...

BUSH: I think it's had the out of the assassination business, and it is out of the assassination business.

AGRONSKY: You are telling me it is out of the assassination business?

BUSH: Is and should be.

AGRONSKY: Is and should be. And you know there was testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee in 1975, an intelligence officer, a member of the CIA, told the Committee that another intelligence officer under the CIA had asked him flat out to murder Mr. Lamumba. You're aware of that.

BUSH: I'm aware of some of the testimony, but I'll tell you something. When I went to CIA, I looked ahead, not back. I looked back enough to be sure CIA cooperated with all the investigations, but I'm no expert on what happened in Africa and whatever it was, in the 50s and 60s.

AGRONSKY: Well let's come -- let's come to Chile, which I think is also pretty interesting.

On September the 15th, 1970, the former President of United States, Mr. Nixon, instructed one of your predecessors, Mr. Helms to encourage a military coup against the democratic

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system of another country, that was Chile. Right? Now if someone said to you -- someone had said to you -- that someone would say to your successor, who would be Admiral Turner if he's nominated, that you should do that, would you do it. Should your successor do it?

BUSH: Adolf Hitler...

[Confusion of voices]

BUSH: ...and we all had a lot of hindsight. We all could say, "Look, if this guy stays in power he's going to send two million Jews to the gas chamber, four million soldiers from a free world are going to be killed, many people in the Soviet Union are going to suffer the cruelists aggression in advance. Now, one of the things we want you to do is support the party in power, or the party out of power to get rid of this mad man," I'd do that -- sure I'd do it. And that is some -- covert action properly conceived, signed off on by the President, under presidential finding on recommendations by the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, NSC Advisor had a place sparingly used albeit in our system.

So I used the Hitler analogy to say I would not rule the kind of policitcal action that covert action implies.

AGRONSKY: That's a pretty tough answer.

BUSH: It's a pretty straightforward one, and it's a pretty good analogy, because -- how would you answer it? I don't want to -- I'm supposed to be answer the questions -- but how would your listeners answer it if they had -- to me it's a very clear answer if political action could overthrow Hitler who was in power rather than reach the havoc he did in the world, I can't conceive of somebody saying we shouldn't do that.

AGRONSKY: All right. So lets look down the road, if another Hitler should come into being. And let us say the Soviet Union, if you like, were to be ruled by a man who had the potential as we could see it, of becoming a Hitler. Would you feel that that kind of action against such a ruler would be justified?

BUSH: Political action? Not assasination?

AGRONSKY: Assasination.

BUSH: Well, no, I'm talking about political action. Support a party to get the guy out of power.

AGRONSKY: Well, my impression was that you had said that if it were necessary to bring about the assasination...

BUSH: No, no, I said -- I'm glad you got into clarifying that. I'm just saying that -- I was talking about



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covert action, political action to get rid of somebody. I have said the CIA was not in the assassination business, doesn't belong in the assassination business. Now if you want to conjure up a scenario and make me go back and think of the Hitler plan, I would have trouble giving you too straightforward an answer. But in terms of political action, I have no trouble at all.

AGRONSKY: Okay. Let me ask you this. One thing that concerns an awful lot of people, and it derived from what we've learned from Watergate during the time when Mr. Nixon was President and conducting operations along with Mr. Helms who was your predecessor before Mr. Colby. Is that the Director of the CIA took orders unquestionably from the President of the United States. He permitted himself to be involved, for example, in the coverup of Watergate. He permitted himself to be involved in the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile. How do you set up in the future, a situation in which the Director of the CIA could conceivably be willing to say no to the President of the United States. Could it ever happen?

BUSH: Sure. And frankly, without going into detail, I disagreed with the President. Some people said, "Oh, you were from the same party as the President therefore you would have to go out and do what he said." My argument to the Senate was, "Look, I got the confidence of the President if I -- I hope I've got the integrity that if I see something I think is wrong or something I don't approve of his doing, I'll bring it up.

Now, I'm not advocating at having 25 Presidents heads of these different agencies each saying his conscience is with the governed. But I answered the question for the Senate. I said, "Of course I'd take it up with the President." And then if I saw something I thought was so morally offensive, I would have one real option, maybe two. One would be to get the heck out of there, and secondly -- would, you know resign, and secondly would be cooperating and reporting to the United States Congress.

But I don't think that that's a difficulty at all. It's thrown up all the time as one, but the problem -- I'm not going to prejudge your hypothesis, in fact, I'm not sure I accept the thing you said about the Chile case. But in the future, as in the recent past, covert actions of that nature are staffed out very differently. And there are presidential findings, and those findings are reported in timely fashion under the law to seven committees of the United States Congress.

So Martin, we are protected in this country against the kind of thing that you defined in your question.

AGRONSKY: I wonder how protected we are. I ...

BUSH: Well, I know more about it than you and I'm telling you it works according to the law, and according to the procedures set out by the President in the Executive Order. And maybe President

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Carter and Admiral Turner will find ways to make it better. I'm not saying it can't be better, but you are protected. Because we don't have the ability to have the kind of double tracking that you're talking about in that in retrospect appears to be less than procedurally thought, or where people were excluded who should be in the decision making.

AGRONSKY: So you are saying that the prospect for abuse by the CIA of its powers and of the intelligence process that existed in the Nixon administration has now been...

BUSH: Why just Nixon, what about Bay of Pigs? How about the Bay of Pigs? How about in the Johnson days. I mean I don't like...

[Confusion of voices]

AGRONSKY: All right. I'm perfectly willing to take the case of Johnson...

BUSH: Okay. And I'm saying -- I think, Martin, that the procedures are such, and I think the directive by the Director is such, and the Attorney General's guidelines are such, and I think the Executive Order is such, and then I think the education of the culture is such that the rights of the American people are properly safeguarded against the kinds of abuses you take about. But if you mean does that eliminates using covert action, or spying, or clandestinity, the answer is no, thank heaven.

AGRONSKY: All right. Would you agree that sometimes disclosure -- disclosure by the press, by the media -- of some wrong action that is being contemplated might be useful in preventing that action from being undertaken?

BUSH: Well, I don't know -- that depends what it is. I mean I don't think each person in his conscience should have the right to leak classified information to the press, if that's what the question is.

But if you say does press exposure of something that was clearly wrong in the past help straighten things out in the future, I'd have to say certainly it would.

AGRONSKY: All right. There is legislation that now provides that if the reporter comes into possession of information that affects the national security, he can be called before a grand jury and asked to reveal his source. If he does not reveal his source he is held to be guilty of a crime. Doesn't that in effect protect the CIA, protects the President from disclosure of contemplation of some wrong acts...

BUSH: I don't even know the legislation you're talking about. There's all kinds of legislation ...

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[Confusion of voices]

BUSH: ...but none in effect that does what you're saying. So -- but Martin, you and I -- I don't know -- I shouldn't say this because I don't know where you come down on it -- I come down on it that I cannot condone the concept that if a person -- a press person gets ahold of highly classified information, that that gives him the right, in his conscience to publish this without penalty. I simply don't believe that it's proper. And again ...

AGRONSKY: ...to return to the Bay of Pigs that the New York Times had that story and didn't use it, and was asked not to use on the grounds of jeopardizing national security, and did not.

Looking back I think you would concede that had the New York Times published and that had the Bay of Pigs never taken place, our country would have been a hell of a lot better off.

BUSH: My recollection -- I think that's right, given what happened. My recollection at the time was that the American people, in a different time, in a different day, in a different way, in a different climate, they're problem with the Bay of Pigs thing was not that it was conceived, but that it didn't work back in those days. And so you can't use -- it seems to me one of the great difficulties we've had is using a 1977 highly homed ethics in terms of operation, in terms of political contributions, to judge events in 1961. That's the jest of it.

AGRONSKY: All right. Well look, here's something that just happened this week, in 1977. The Wilmington Sunday News Journal reports that the former CIA Director Richard Helms has threatened if he's indicted for perjury because of testimony he made before a Senate committee in 1973 on the role that the CIA played in Chile, that is in the overthrow of the Allende regime, that he will name Secretary of State Kissinger as the man who ordered him to undertake that act.

Now from your knowledge as a former CIA Director -- and you must have looked back that far -- do you think that Helms is -- would be justified in doing that? And was he indeed ordered by the Secretary of State to do that?

BUSH: For the first and I hope the last time on this program, no comment. I'm not going to discuss a matter that's in the courts, and I think that's a proper position to be in, and I just simply can't -- I didn't read the story. Sorry, Martin. No comment.

AGRONSKY: You're not going to say anything...

BUSH: No, no comment. Both are my friends and both are

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very decent individuals, Dick Helms and Kissinger, and I'm simply not going to get into that kind of thing. And I don't honestly know the facts on it.

AGRONSKY: Well, let me...

BUSH: If I'd have spent all my time as CIA Director looking into aberations or alleged aberations or events in the past, I could't have done any kind of a job for the present or the future. And I'm egotistical enough to feel that I did do job for the present and the future.

AGRONSKY: Are you egotistical enough to believe that the CIA is the provider of good intelligence now?

BUSH: I'm egotis -- well I don't think I even have to be egotistical. I think I am objective enough to think we provide the best foreign intelligence in the world, we are hampered in some ways, but -- by fear of risks of disclosure, because for awhile and a while more we...

[Confusion of voices]

BUSH: ...as we were. I -- again you're going back to pre-Bush time in terms of the Angola intelligence, but I think we have pretty good intelligence today on Angola, some areas much better than others. We don't have, in some places, the sources we have in others. But I think we can tell you roughly how many Cubans are in Angola, and I'm not sure we can tell you the intent all the time, but I think we have fair intelligence around the world.

I know we've got the best, but some areas are better than others.

AGRONSKY: Well, on that very positive note, I'll say thank you, Mr. Bush.