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Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Chile (Korry) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)

Identificador Archival:	frus:frus1969-76v21/d102
Agencia Emisora:	NSC / Casa Blanca
Fecha del Documento:	1970-09-17
Colección / Serie:	FRUS 1969–1976, vol. XXI: Chile, 1969–1973

Nota de Archivo: *Santiago. Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 777, Country Files, Latin America, Chile 1970. Secret.*

Set forth below is a message for Dr. Kissinger from Amb. Korry which was received at 2030 hours 17 September, 1970.

1. I reckon that if something is to happen to stop the Allende Presidency, it will occur this weekend or never.

2. What I believe could happen, starting in a few hours, is the following scenario:

A. A public declaration over all media from the Minister of Finance and/or the Minister of Economy informing the country that the economic situation is desperate.

B. The resignation of the two Ministers tonight or tomorrow, followed by the resignation of other Ministers.

C. The appointment of military to fill the portfolios of Interior, Defense, Health and Labor. (The two economic slots are question marks because the military considers these sectors beyond their competence but I trust they can be persuaded to use advisors.)

D. The resignation of President Frei and his appointment, as the constitution permits, of an interim President who would be one of the Armed Forces CINCs.

E. A declaration by the junta that it wishes to assure the country a democratic choice of its system and of its next President.

3. There are several weak points in this script, all named Frei. He had maneuvered skillfully to produce the crisis, but, as is his habit, always permitting others to push the process step by step for him. If he were not to permit the resignations of the two Ministers, if he were not to resign as a consequence, if he were not to persuade the Army CINC General Schneider, the most constitutionalist of all the military, to go along with this scheme, it could become unstuck. And if the military does not act with speed and skill, qualities with which they are not ordinarily endowed, the coup could become a very sloppy and bloody mess.

4. The military situation has been at least temporarily transformed by the statement last night of retired General Viaux. While the public considers the declaration to be trivial and egocentric, the Army, the Armed Forces and Frei believe it to be of transcendental significance. Viaux is considered by the military, with good reason, to have considerable influence with the younger officers and the non-coms. The men who really control the troops. As President Frei said to a trusted source today, the Viaux statement "served to bring the army in line, unifying it while at the same time demonstrating that Chilean generals are not for sale." (The latter is a reference to Viaux' rebuff of Allende.)

5. Because my interpretation of Viaux' influence tallied with Frei's, I persuaded MinDefense Ossa Monday night to cease trying to block the Viaux statement on which I had given the green light to Raul Saez last weekend. Incidentally, for the record, [less than 1 line not declassified] has performed a very valuable service for me in helping to elicit this message from Viaux.

6. Equally strongly with Ossa—and that means Frei—I pushed for the MinFinance statement that I hope is coming shortly. Since Frei insisted on a moral justification for any action, I could think of only the economic situation as providing it. The MinFinance and the MinEconomy are determined to resign; they are so persuaded because they want to provoke the crisis and push the military and Frei to action. They are both good friends; indeed they are the only two Ministers in whom I have absolute confidence and with whom I have maintained the most special friendships. But I have stayed totally clear of them, preferring to deal with the minimal contacts, in this case, Ossa and Saez. The latter exercises considerable influence with both.

7. Most of Chile began at noon today the national independence holidays. The Armed Forces have been goose-stepping through their parade drills for days in preparation for the big parade I will attend Saturday. Tomorrow morning there is the Te Deum in the Cathedral with all of us diplomats in our monkey suits. The mass of the country is prepared to drink itself into a stupor, to spend its extra wages and to have a respite from the intensive political talk in this country that should be rechristened Blahblandia. But the forces that Santiago Garrison Commander Gen. Valenzuela informed me two weeks ago Sunday would be concentrated in Santiago are here in less but sufficient numbers and for the moment the army is more or less united for the first time in a long time.

8. Frei believes that the combination of the Viaux and the economic statements will be sufficient to provoke the army takeover. Frei this morning compared the Armed Forces to a stretched rubber band that was ready to snap. He said they were now fighting "as a caste."

9. However, Frei did not say he would specifically give the approval to the army takeover. He did not say he would convince Schneider. He did not say he would resign. And these lacunae worry me. He may be assuming that he has structured the situation to move itself, his favorite method of political action. His may be a very large assumption. He was much more final in his judgement about the future if the Armed Forces did not move. He said he would have not hope in the Rube Goldberg political contraption; he said that he could not win more than 25 per cent of his own party for the political formula route and that he had "discarded" it. It was the army or nothing.

10. My moment of decision is at hand. I must decide what if anything I must do to make Frei's decisions again for him; I did it in the case of the Anaconda negotiations last year but that was kinder-garten exercise in comparison to this olympic gymnastic. I seek no advice because we have done everything possible to touch all bases: Gen. Valenzuela knows very clearly my views; the Ministers of Economy and Finance are fully aware of my sentiments; Frei has been told; and they all are informed as to how they must proceed against those who threaten to plunge the country into civil war. I have excellent support for [from?] those here who need to know.

11. Tally ho.