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Memorandum From the Station in Chile to the 40 Committee

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Nota de Archivo: *Santiago. Source: National Archives, RG 59, Chile–ITT–CIA 1963–1977, Lot 81D121, Documents Requested by the Department of Justice, 1970–1977. Secret; Sensitive. This memorandum is addressed to Kissinger, Mitchell, Packard, Johnson, Moorer, and Helms. The memorandum was distributed under cover of a September 19 memorandum from Karamessines, which noted that Kissinger had requested that it be disseminated to the principals of the 40 Committee and discussed at the next meeting. Most of the information in the memorandum had already been reported by Korry in his backchannel message sent the evening of September 17 (Document 102). However, in subsequent discussion at the 40 Committee meeting (see Document 104) and in an NSC memorandum (Document 106), reference is only made to the CIA report and the September 19 report.*

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17 September 1970

Chile, Santiago (17 September 1970)

Possible Move by Chilean Armed Forces to take over Government with the Knowledge of President Eduardo Frei

[9 lines not declassified]

The Chilean armed forces may stage a coup shortly. Whether they move depends on President Frei who believes there is no longer hope for a constitutional solution and recognizes the necessity of military intercession but has not committed himself in any way. General Valenzuela, Commander of the Santiago garrison is playing a key role in the planned takeover and has reached an understanding with retired General Viaux. The armed forces do not rule out a violent reaction, possibly bordering on civil war, on the part of the left if the military take over the government. End summary.

1. The Chilean armed forces may move soon to take over the government. Whether they act depends on their receiving a go-ahead from President Eduardo Frei involving authorization to take the following steps.

A. Resignation of the Cabinet: (Headquarters Comment: Two independent sources, who are fairly reliable, on 17 September reported rumors that Andres Zaldivar, Minister of Finance, and Carlos Figueroa, Minister of Economics, planned to resign.

B. Formation of a new cabinet composed entirely of military leaders.

C. Appointment by Frei of an Acting President.

D. Frei’s departure from Chile.

(Field Comment: Source gave the impression that an important segment of the armed forces appears to be prepared to accept the above formula and to act accordingly.)

2. After taking over the government, the armed forces plan to publish a manifesto, stating that two-thirds of the Chilean people should be given another opportunity to opt between the Popular Unity (U.P.—A coalition of Marxist, Socialists and other Leftist Parties), and a democratic regime and that the armed forces are prepared to tender the necessary guarantees of another free election. (Headquarters Comment: Marxist Salvador Allende, the U.P. candidate won a plurality (36%) in the 4 September 1970 presidential election in a three-way race against an independent and a Christian Democratic candidate).

3. General Camilo Valenzuela, Commander of the Santiago garrison, is playing a key role in the planned military takeover of the government. Valenzuela's plan involves the arrest of about two hundred key U.P. functionaries.

4. Valenzuela has had several meetings with Retired General Roberto Viaux, leader of the October 1969 military dissension, and a full understanding has been reached between them. A statement published in the 17 September 1970 edition of the independent newspaper El Mercurio over the signature of Viaux to still speculation that he might support Allende was cast in its final form by Valenzuela. (Source Comment: In his statement Viaux denies harboring Communist sympathies and stated that he was willing to serve his country in whatever capacity required. The significance of Viaux's statement is that the armed forces now have the necessary assurances that Viaux will not move unilaterally. Frei said that the greatest importance should be attached to Viaux's statement which was well received by the armed forces and which had served to "bring the army in line, unifying it while at the same time demonstrating that Chilean generals are "not for sale.")

5. The armed forces cannot rule out violent reactions on the part of Allende's followers which could develop into a situation bordering on civil war. According to Valenzuela, the army has within its ranks no more than five percent of Allende sympathizers. Twenty percent of the air force, on the other hand, is believed sympathetic toward Allende. (Source Comment: Since the air force is not going to play a decisive role, other than giving its approval, this factor will not appear to matter a great deal.)

6. In a conversation between President Frei and Rene Silva, the director of El Mercurio, Frei said that Minister of Finance Zaldivar is going to make a statement which, in Frei's opinion, is going to cause major commotion. When asked whether Viaux's statement and the one planned by Zaldivar would provoke a cabinet crisis causing wholesale resignations, Frei replied he thought it would go that way. If that happened, Frei said he did not rule out the formation of a new cabinet composed of military officers, but expressed his opinion that a military cabinet would not be necessary since it was his belief that the military would take over the government. (Field Comment: Source received the impression that Frei may be pushing the military to act using Sergio Ossa, Minister of Defense, to assert pressure on the armed forces.)

7. Frei compared the situation in the armed forces to a "Rubber band on the point of snapping." According to Frei, something will hap-pen soon because the armed forces now realize that they are struggling for institutional survival and that, as far as the armed forces are concerned, the struggle has now taken on a new dimension.

8. Frei unambiguously stated that all thought of pushing through Congress a political formula, i.e., the election and then resignation of independent candidate Jorge Alessandri—should be discarded. At best Frei said he would be able to round up 25 per cent of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC)'s congressional contingent in support of that formula and would thereby split the party. Having ruled out the effectiveness of a political solution, Frei had come to the conclusion that a military solution was the only one. Frei added that Chile was a country which could not be turned over to Allende.

9. (Source Comment: Frei, during the whole course of the conversation, never gave any indication of committing himself in any way. He addressed himself only to the necessity of military intercession and narrated what he thought others would be doing.)