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Memorandum for the 40 Committee Prepared by the National Security Council Staff

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Chile

If the Chilean military move to prevent Allende from taking power:

a. What kinds of problems and reaction can be expected?

b. What diplomatic posture can or should the US take?

I. Possible Courses of Developments

Should a military/civilian coup occur, along the lines described in September 19 report, the new interim government would have the following major problems to face:

—To cope with the reaction from Allende forces;

—To maintain law and order and a viable economic life for the country;

—To secure reasonable acquiescence or support for a framework and formula for government, e.g., new elections.

Reaction to a military move may take one of the following courses listed below in order of likelihood, i.e., from most to least likely:

A. Civic pressure by Allende forces to force military back-down.

This would involve attempts to stage general strikes, transportation stoppages and disruption of public services, street demonstrations, mobilization of public opinion—all with the intent of paralyzing the nation’s life so as to create irresistible pressure on the military to back down.

The Allende forces are almost sure to try this course of action—it is the least they can do. They have a very good chance of disrupting things initially, given Communist Party influence in the labor movement. It is less certain they can sustain any significant paralysis for more than several days if met with firmness. In any case, the situation is not likely to stop at this level for long; if strikes and similar activity do not succeed, the Allende forces are likely to escalate their counter-revolution to one of the following levels.

B. Civic violence to force military breakdown or dissolution of military's cohesion.

This would involve street violence, rural violence, squatter invasions, possibly terrorism and sabotage—all designed to achieve either or both of the following: (1) to create such chaos the government collapses, or (2) to provoke the military into enough violent repression to provoke overwhelming popular opposition to the coup.

There is about a 60% chance that the Allende reaction will merge into this level or move to it immediately. Capacity to provoke riots or sabotage does exist; however, capacity to sustain this sufficiently long to be successful is less clear. Still more doubtful is whether sustained violence of this kind will receive popular support in a country that does not like violence.

The military/police will be strained if violence is spread in several places or sustained for a long period. If the military is not unified, it is doubtful the government could contain the situation. If the military is required to use violence against citizens, e.g., shoot workers or students, it may not be able to hold the situation. Much depends upon government's backing and leadership and the will of the security forces.

C. Counter-coup—divide the military

This would involve an effort to persuade units and troops to oppose a takeover, disobey orders or to launch a counter-coup.

The Allende forces will undoubtedly try this, and are already seeking to persuade military personnel not to support any plan to launch a coup. This is unlikely to be successful, but the position of non-coms is admittedly a question mark. If the military, following a coup, must use repression to sustain their success, the chances of a defection or counter-coup rise proportionately.

D. Long-term insurgency

This would involve a long-term effort to subvert the coup-installed regime, sabotage subsequent elections, and bring about a leftist government. It would in effect be the result of a failure to prevent the initial military coup or secure its reversal through the preceding courses. It would involve insurgency, sabotage, terrorism, and efforts to spread popular disaffection and to hamper government economically and politically so as to make government impossible.

There is a less than even chance this will occur. If initial efforts fail, the left extremists are not likely to have the leadership or assets left to mount a significant effort of this kind in the immediate future. On the other hand, nuclei can be supported from outside, and this may be the response favored by the Communist and Castroist elements.

E. Civil War

This would be the result of steady escalation of civic violence and consequent polarization in the society, with military and para-military units dividing against each other. This situation is not likely to be visible or easily identifiable as such—it is likely to emerge, if it does, only as the extension of other violence and the result of the degeneration of the situation into chaos.

A chaotic, civil war situation will clearly invite external intervention from the outside on both sides. A clearly chaotic situation is one in which legitimized intervention is easiest, i.e., OAS, mediation, Rio Treaty action, Inter-American Peace Committee.

III. [II] Key Factors

The following are key factors in determining whether a military move of a kind contemplated succeeds:

A. What Allende does personally.

If Allende stays and personally commits himself to violent resistence, the chances for widespread serious instability and violence are sharply increased. If he decides not to do so or leaves the country, or is made to leave the country, the chances for successful violent resistance are proportionately decreased. Allende's personal leadership and charisma are important.

B. Unity of the military

No military action, or support of a successor regime, can be achieved without reasonable unity among the armed forces. If there are any defections of major units, no effort is likely to succeed. A particularly key factor is the loyalty of non-coms and troops to their officers. There have been reports of Allende sympathy in enlisted ranks and of doubts on the part of commanding officers that troops would follow them. If this were the case, no coup and no effort to maintain law and order against heavy civic violence are likely to succeed.

C. What Frei does

Just as Allende's leadership is important to his forces, Frei's leadership is essential to the coup/electoral formula in the same but converse terms.

D. The Governmental Formula

A coup which promises new elections is more likely to succeed than a mere seizure and retention of power by the military. It is more likely to secure the support of civilian and elite elements. A mere power-seizure will elicit opposition among non-Allende forces and be divisive within the military itself.

IV. [III] Most Likely Situational Problems That May Arise

From an external point of view, the situational problems most likely to arise are:

A. Chilean military request for arms and aid.

The military are very likely to use up their crowd-control supplies (tear gas, etc), small arms, and ammunition fairly rapidly. They may even need additional communications, transportation to cope with a widespread security situation. They will in all probability turn to the U.S. for this aid, but they may also turn to other Latin American or to European countries.

B. Chaotic civil war type of situation

If a complete breakdown in order and national life and widespread bloodshed and violence of a civil war kind occur, or is threatened, the question will arise as to whether outside intervention is not desirable to stabilize the situation, prevent chaos and bloodshed. OAS, Inter-American Peace Committee, Rio Treaty are all possible in these situations. Effective intervention need not be military intervention; mediation, good offices, OAS-supported formula for elections are all possibilities.

C. Economic support to shore-up interim Government

An interim—or subsequently elected government—will probably require additional budgetary resources to keep the situation stable and insure popular support. The need may be sustained and large. Again Chile is likely to turn to the U.S., the Inter-American and World Banks, possibly to Europe.

D. Consequences of success or failure

In sum, if a military/civilian coup succeeds, the resulting government will have very difficult problems in maintaining law and order; keep-ing the society together; insuring sufficient popular support to be viable; maintaining a climate in which a new election can be held and the results sustained; keeping the economy healthy.

If a coup is attempted and fails, the military will be destroyed. The Communists will have the opportunity to move quickly and with certainty to destroy most of the societal and institutional barriers to a Marxist regime—military, opposition parties, press.

V. [IV] U.S. Posture

A. Basic Posture. The policy questions posed for us by a Chilean coup attempt are:

1. Do we support the military effort if our help is needed, i.e., equipment, etc., money? Do we do so openly or clandestinely?

2. Do we adopt a public posture of neutralism, or of support, or something in-between?

It is unlikely that a military/civilian coup can sustain itself without some kind of external assistance. Hence, if we do not extend some kind of help it will collapse. On the other hand, open and visible U.S. support runs the risk of damaging the Chilean military/civilian base of support—and conversely strengthening Allende—by making the coup appear to be foreign intervention. We would also suffer in the hemisphere and domestically by reawakening the Dominican Republic and Czechoslovakia images.

One possibility of acceptable public action, however, would be OAS concern in the event of a chaotic situation—see below.

B. Operational problems

1. Military assistance. We can be virtually certain that we will receive requests for equipment and arms. We can supply these through MAP or covertly through third-country sources. We may well wish to do both, but we should be ready to do so.

2. Economic aid. We will almost surely have to shore-up any resulting government. We should therefore be prepared to move in massively with supporting assistance.

3. International. If the situation deteriorates or threatens to, a relatively easily legitimized way of helping stabilize it is to seek OAS or Inter-American Peace Committee action to mediate, arrange new elections, halt fighting. We should have contingency legal arguments and proposals ready for this.

4. Recognition. The question of recognition may arise if the coup occurs in such a way as to indicate clearly a new government has come into existence. On the other hand, if military officers merely substitute for cabinet ministers and convoke new elections, the legal fiction of no extra constitutional change of government may be defensible. In any event, recognition can probably be extended and coordinated with other Latin American countries in a relatively prompt and acceptable fashion.