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Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Chile (Korry) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Meyer) and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)

Identificador Archival:	frus:frus1969-76v21/d108
Agencia Emisora:	NSC / Casa Blanca
Fecha del Documento:	1970-09-21
Colección / Serie:	FRUS 1969–1976, vol. XXI: Chile, 1969–1973

Nota de Archivo: *Santiago. Source: National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Chile, 1970. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.*

SITUATION REPORT

1. During the evening hours of 20 September, Ambassador Korry conversed with Defense Minister Sergio Ossa about the situation in Chile, analyzing steps that President Frei could take in order to precipitate a constitutional crisis. In the intermission of an opera performance on 19 September, Frei had suggested to the Ambassador that he and Ossa get together soonest. The Ambassador's talk with Minister of Economy, Carlos Figueroa, in the morning of 20 September, (previously reported), had touched on the same pivotal issue and scanned the spectrum of options still available. Both reports should therefore be read in conjunction, bearing in mind that Ossa, by virtue of his cabinet post, is obviously more conversant with conditions in the armed forces of Chile.

2. The Ambassador and Ossa immediately agreed that time was running out and that any planned moves would have to be speeded up. Ossa expected Communist pressures to be building up, especially since the Communists by now may be aware that some military move may be afoot.

3. Ossa confirmed that President Frei had not talked to any members of the high commands recently. He agreed fully with the Ambassador's observation that the least the president could do was to apprise General Schneider of the fact that a favorable parliamentary solution is no longer in the cards.

4. Whereas Figueroa had disclaimed knowledge of any discussion, with Frei participating, about the resignation of certain cabinet members to force a crisis, Ossa stated that this matter had been talked about and that there was agreement among members of the "inner circle" that resignations, if tendered, should be accepted. Frei, in approving the idea, had never indicated that he would follow suit.

5. Ossa told the Ambassador that he had personally broached the issue of a cabinet crisis to General Schneider. The General had replied that he would assume responsibility for filling certain ministerial vacancies, stressing that in so doing he would merely be acting in protection of the constitution by insuring tranquility while the remaining electoral processes are unrolling. (Ambassador's Comment: It was clear to Ossa and me that what Schneider's reply was meant to convey was that, under any conditions, he would do nothing to prevent Allende's election by congress.)

6. In discussing the assignment of officers to cabinet posts, Schneider made it clear that he would assign the best and most talented men available, thereby unavoidably destroying their military careers. Schneider expressed a personal preference for the retention of Zaldivar, Figueroa and Ossa in their capacity as experienced technicians.

7. In discussing likely candidates to fill vacated cabinet posts, Ossa mentioned General Carlos Pratts as well suited for the Minister of Interior. His cooperation in any effort to stop Allende could be depended upon. As regards General Schneider, Ossa considers him the strongest single influence among the officer corps which, by and large, espouses the constitutionalist line he propounds. The prevalent feeling among the officers is that the politicians got Chile into the mess in which she finds herself and that it behooves the politicians to extricate her. Schneider therefore, would continue to be a problem, in his present position as well as in capacity of Minister of Interior.

8. Winding up their talk, Ossa and the Ambassador agreed on the following courses of action:

Message from Ambassador to Frei:

I have encouraged many Chileans to stay on in Chile until at least 24 October, but I cannot be party to endangering any lives. Why should I, as United States Ambassador, hold out hope to Chileans if the president tells my Italian and German colleagues that he himself no longer has any hope of an October 24 congressional formula.

If Frei chooses to continue playing self-pitying and inactive role, history is bound to judge him harshly, (and not Allende or Tomic) as mainly responsible for Chile's loss to Communism. It will be difficult to conceal the record of his stewardship from world opinion which would consider him the Kerensky of Chile. Frei's only concern appeared to be not to have to suffer the physical indignity of handing over the sash of the presidency to Allende.

Frei should know that not a nut or bolt will be allowed to reach a Chile under Allende (and that his recommendations to that effect, the Ambassador is sure, will receive the support of the President of the United States). Once Allende comes to power, we shall do all within our power to condemn Chile and the Chileans to utmost deprivation and poverty, a policy designed for a long time to come to accelerate the harsh features of a Communist society in Chile. Hence, for Frei to believe that there will be much of an alternative to utter misery, such as seeing Chile muddle through, would be strictly illusory.

Ossa voiced total agreement with the points made above and promised that they would be conveyed in toto to President Frei.

9. Pressure on Military.

Ossa agreed with the necessity to bring home to the military now already that inactivity in the face of threatening Allende victory would spell a highly damaging reorientation in relations between the United States and Chile. As an earnest of such intent, the Ambassador told Ossa, oral messages would be sent to General Schneider and Guerraty and to Admiral Porta, advising them that all MAP supported trips to the United States will have to be suspended. Ossa declared himself in complete accord with this proposed step.

10. Cabinet Re-Shuffle:

Ossa agreed to pursue actively the Ambassador's suggestion that Frei be persuaded either to quit the country or to invite military participation in the cabinet in such a way as to offer Chile an option other than Allende. If necessary, General Schneider would have to be neutralized, by displacement if necessary.