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Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Chile (Korry) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson)

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1. [less than 1 line not declassified] came to my office October 5 to relate a story that pointed to the possibility of Chilean military intervention. He recounted that at the request of the oil companies, the Army had named a liaison officer several weeks ago so that in the event of any contingencies the oil companies installations would be protected. The officer selected was a Major Palma. (From ArmA records it would appear to be Major Ricardo Salvador Palma Wormald, passed over for promotion with about two more years of service remaining; not very intelligent or impressive.) Palma was designated by General Valenzuela as the liaison man.

2. Some three weeks ago when Palma appeared at [less than 1 line not declassified] office he developed a good relationship with [less than 1 line not declassified] source of the following [name not declassified]. At that time Palma denounced the political parties in crudest terms and said that the last time the Army was called, it faced only 200 men and killed 20 (presumably a reference to the confrontation at El Salvador during the early years of the Frei administration). This time we shall come out shooting, he added.

3. On October 5 he visited [less than 1 line not declassified] and swore him to secrecy, then said he was preparing for military intervention within 10 days. Palma said he would be “military interventor” in the oil industry, the term employed when military takes over an industry under national siege or similar legislation. He pulled out list of all employees of ESSO at its four main locations (Santiago’s two airports, Maipu and Las Salinas which is near Vina del Mar where there is a plant for receiving fuel from ships). The names were typed on Army stationery and bore the official seal. Palma asked [less than 1 line not declassified] to identify the dependable and the undependable. He asked him for a complete list of all trucks and owners dealing with ESSO throughout the country and for a list of all service stations in Santiago of all brands. [less than 1 line not declassified] provided answers to the first and third requests and promised to seek information on the second. Palma said that when the Army moved it intended to close all but nine gas stations; those would be used by the Army while the “enemy” would be sealed off.

4. Less precise but equally lurid information has been reaching us from many quarters and it usually proves to be nothing more than wishful thinking. This report must be considered in the same vein.

5. However I would prefer that we ceased to check out all such reports and to be totally surprised by whatever might develop in the Armed Forces. In the present circumstances it is waste activity for all concerned. Hence I am instructing CAS and DAO to desist from the normal efforts to learn of possible military moves.