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Memorandum From Viron P. Vaky of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)

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Chile—SRG Meeting October 14: NSSM–97

There are fundamental differences among agencies as to how an Allende government is to be perceived and what its effect on U.S. interests really would be. There are therefore different views about what kind of a policy we ought to have and what we ought to do about various operational decisions that now face us.

We commissioned NSSM–97 precisely to enable us to make a conceptual decision about how to perceive and deal with an Allende government which could in turn be expressed in the operational decisions we would have to make. Because many of these operating decisions are now pressing and because considerable emotion is felt over what agencies consider to be the principles involved, the agencies are anxious to have NSSM 97 considered. They look to it as the vehicle by which this basic decision will be made.

What we want to get out of this exercise, therefore, is a Presidential decision on this basic policy question. There are a whole variety of operational decisions we will have to make, and which the SRG may wish to review (see below), but the nature of those decisions will depend upon the basic premise and concept we adopt concerning the situation.

The attached paper prepared in response to NSSM 97 was written in August, and suffers a little bit from the time-lag. But it contains a still current assessment of Allende's probable goals and prospects, and their impact on our interests. The paper poses four options which are largely stereotypes to highlight distinctions in posture; it does not describe the refinements or combinations that might also be possible.

As pointed out in the Analytical Summary (see especially Section IV, pp 7), however, the basic question about what policy to adopt can be answered only after one decides what he believes concerning what an Allende government will be and do, and what kind of threat it poses for us. Thus, these prior perceptual judgments must be made before one can fruitfully consider the costs and benefits of various options.

As also noted, the real trouble we have—and the reason there is so much vexation about this matter—is that there are basic differences in the assumptions various people hold about an Allende government and what it means. I therefore suggest that you spend some time in the discussion trying to spotlight and surface the analytical and interpretive differences in this regard. If we glide over these or fuzz them up, we will only have trouble later in deciding policy courses because we may mistakenly assume that everyone views the problem the same way.

The agencies consider the basic policy question of sufficient importance that they will wish a Presidential decision. State may request an NSC meeting. You will therefore have to consider how to handle the matter after the SRG meets. My own view is that a formal NSC meeting would be desirable but is not essential. If scheduling or other reasons makes it impossible to hold it in the next week, then we should move the paper up to the President for decision. If we do that, however, you should invite the agencies to submit their views and recommendations on the paper in writing for transmittal to the President—this would reas-sure them that they will get their position in and control the way it is presented.

Another point you should consider—although you need not bring this up at the meeting—is how to implement whatever policy decision is made. How do we ensure an adequate game plan or strategy? My own view is to have the President call for the formulation of a game plan and have the SRG supervise or review its implementation.

A number of small operational matters are now pending and decisions cannot long be delayed. You will not want to get into these in this meeting, but it may be helpful to the principals to understand the kinds of consequences basic policy posture can have if you list some of these questions:

—Do we send a special or high-powered delegation to the November 4 inauguration? (You may wish to discuss this point somewhat.)

—Do we make any public statement regarding our attitude toward an Allende government, such as the usual expression of hope we can get along?

—What do we do about the complex US operations we have there—Peace Corps, AFTAC, NASA, etc.?

—Do we start to wind down our activities and limit our presence, or wait until we get invited out?

—What do we do about pending loans and MAP?

Your Talking Points outline the sequence of questions and issues that we have to decide to get at the basic policy question, as well as the procedure you want to follow. My own recommendation is indicated briefly at the end of the Analytical Summary, and elaborated on in a memo I am submitting separately.

I also am including in your book for your information an INR piece analyzing what an Allende government is likely to mean. You may wish to skim it because it presents the “other” view—maybe it won’t be so bad.