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Record of a Briefing by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Meyer)

Identificador Archival:	frus:frus1969-76v21/d178
Agencia Emisora:	Departamento de Estado
Fecha del Documento:	1970-11-13
Colección / Serie:	FRUS 1969–1976, vol. XXI: Chile, 1969–1973

Nota de Archivo: *Washington. Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL108, Geopolitical File, Chile, 2–30 Nov. 1970. Secret; Sensitive. This briefing was held at the 40 Committee meeting. See Document 179.*

State

Mr. U. Alexis Johnson

Mr. Charles A. Meyer

Defense

Mr. G. Warren Nutter

Mr. Armistead I. Selden

Lt. Gen. Donald Bennett

CIA

Mr. Richard Helms

Mr. David H. Blee

Mr. Thomas H. Karamessines

Mr. William Broe

JCS

Lt. Gen. Richard T. Knowles

NSC Staff

Col. Richard Kennedy

Mr. Frank Chapin

Mr. Arnold Nachmanoff

Mrs. Jeanne W. Davis

Mr. Johnson: I heard Charley Meyer describe his experiences in Chile and I thought they were highly interesting and he should brief this group while they were still fresh in his mind.

Mr. Meyer: I had two hours with Frei, five hours with the former Ministers of Finance, Interior and Defense, an hour with Alessandri, and forty-five minutes with Allende. The Chileans simply do not accurately evaluate the threat to Chile. They believe they will be saved by the miraculous character of their mystique or by immobilization of the bureaucracy, or their tradition of democracy. They are convinced that there is something in the Chilean character which will soften the blow of Marxism. They have no concept whatsoever of what will happen in a police state. I told them over and over that they would have to be realistic enough to keep their eyes open. Conservatives are convinced that the Christian Democrats robbed them of 35,000 votes. They insist that they did not lose the election but that it was stolen from them. The Christian Democrats do not have the kind of blind hatred, but they have no respect for the Nationalistas.

Mr. Kissinger: Does anyone believe the Conservatives? Did the CD steal votes?

Mr. Meyer: No, I don't believe it.

Mr. Broe: No, we don't think so.

Mr. Meyer: The Christian Democrats are completely split. Frei thinks he was sacrificed by that madman Tomic. Valdez is a pure self-seeker.

Mr. Kissinger: But wasn't Tomic Frei's candidate?

Mr. Meyer: No, he was the party's candidate. Frei had lost control of the party.

Mr. Kissinger: Does Frei think another Christian Democrat could have won?

Mr. Meyer: Yes. The Christian Democrats convention opens November 28 and no one knows who, if anyone, will emerge as the effective party leader.

Mr. Kissinger: It can't be Frei?

Mr. Meyer: It could be, but Frei recognizes that he will be the favorite target for everyone. He is prepared to stay and to make some sacrifices but he has never said that he would pick up the baton of leadership. Assuming any political opposition is possible, any concept is so fractured as to be hopeless. After the Christian Democrats get through their period of self-excoriation and decide who will run the party, it might be possible. At the moment it's a mess. I asked if the two parties—the Christian Democrats and the Nationalistas—couldn't get together. The CD felt they could accommodate the rational side of the Nationalistas, but the far right of the Nationalistas won't do business with anyone. In other words, I had no feeling of any rock on which we could build a church.

Mr. Kissinger: Then what happens to our plan that we should allow time to Allende so as to crystalize an opposition?

Mr. Meyer: We might do that later. But every Chilean or Latin American that I talked to said that if the US did anything to draw strong or adverse attention to Allende, the 36% of the popular vote which he got would be 70% within 24 hours. They all felt this was true at least within the first 100 days. They all begged us not to put an anti-US stamp on Allende.

Mr. Kissinger: Why doesn't he force us to, then? Why is he making it easy for us not to take a strong stand against him?

Mr. Meyer: One problem is that the group around him is not his choice. Frei analyzes him as a vain man, an astute politician, but not a profound student of Marxism. Indeed, Frei thinks he has never read Marx. Allende has been persuaded that he is in constant danger of his life—he is almost paranoid. Frei does not believe that Allende can run the country, but

thinks he will try.

Mr. Kissinger: How did he survive 24 years of political life if he is that vapid?

Mr. Meyer: Remember he was in the Socialist party and there is a great difference between being a Senator and being Chief Executive. Frei warned Allende that sooner or later everyone would turn against him and that his only strength would lie in the Army. Frei told me after Schneider had died that he was surprised there had not been a putsch. I think it is the basic abhorrence of Chileans toward fighting other Chileans. So far as the Cabinet is concerned, no one in Chile knows much about them. They are all radicals of course, but the sub-Cabinet is even worse.

Mr. Kissinger: From what you say, we find that Allende is vain, given to spasmodic actions, more a candidate than an executive. It will take a back-breaking effort to control the bureaucracy and his ministers. Our only hope then seems to lie in their incompetence.

Mr. Johnson: And the possibility that they will begin fighting among themselves.

Mr. Meyer: It is a problem of gigantic proportions, and no one can evaluate the outcome. We can only keep our fingers crossed. But everyone begged that we not push on Allende now.

Mr. Kissinger: A good definition of a miracle is a situation where there is no rational expectation of something happening and it happens. I have no feeling of any group or policy likely to challenge Allende. However, we can’t prevent a miracle. Why set limits to the grace of God?

Mr. Selden: Do we have any indications of outside Communist interference in Chile?

Mr. Meyer: They are playing the straight Moscow line.

Mr. Kissinger: In August we were told to lie low so as not to screw up the Congressional vote. In October we were told to lie low so as not to screw up the opposition in November. Now we find ourselves with no opposition.

(The meeting then moved to a meeting of the 40 Committee)