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Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

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1. MinDef General Marambio at lunch with me July 21 at ARMA's home said that he and his fellow chiefs in the Armed Services were determined not to permit a government significantly influenced by the Communists to gain power in Chile.

2. Under questioning (but with no rpt no comments from me of any kind) Marambio confessed that there was no clear plan to implement this determination. He explained the historic reasons for the apolitical attitude of the Army and its almost total unpreparedness for the assumption of power as well as the lack of any desire to have the reins of government. He said the Armed Forces would need someone to put into power and a large team of experts to run the government under that person. He lamented that aside from President Frei there was no such person and that Frei was not prepared to have an "auto-golpe." But he qualified that remark at another point by saying that Frei was equally committed to the proposition that Chile cannot be permitted to have a government dominated by Communist influence. Marambio specifically described such a possible government as being led by a radical such as Senator Baltra or by a Socialist. In other words, he was talking about a Popular Front government. Needless to say, he does not include in his definition of unacceptability any government led by a Christian Democrat, whether it was one of "Popular Unity" or not.

3. Marambio identified PCCh as the true threat. He said that only the Communists had the organization and the discipline to benefit from the incoherence of the other parties. He mentioned that Socialist extremists were lying low for the moment but would seek further provocative tests as they expanded their activities into other universities and sought links with workers.

4. He said that the Argentine military and the Argentine Government on two separate occasions had delivered to him what he could only interpret as clear messages calling for preemptive Chilean military action to forestall an Argentine initiative to eliminate any Marxist government that might come to power here. He disclosed that these messages were couched in the form of pointed statements to the effect that Argentina could not stand by idly if Communist-dominated governments were to assume power in Paraguay or Uruguay, and that in the case of Bolivia it had helped to prevent such an eventuality. When I asked Marambio if all this signified a requirement in his mind to act before the election preemptively or afterward when an unwanted government took office, he simply reverted to his lament about Frei and the absence of alternatives to the President.

5. As in reftel, Marambio enumerated the well known reasons for Chilean military discontent (wages, loss of prestige, poor equipment, etc.) and coupled this with the observation that junior officers and noncoms are increasingly susceptible to non-traditional propaganda and impulses. He noted what has happened in Peru.

6. This led of course to some rather modest requests, notably an insistence on the F–5's, a new request for two C–30's and arrangements to send junior grade Chilean officers (one each from the three services) to the US for one year as integral parts of an active unit. He thanked me for the total of $11 million in MAP the past fiscal year and stressed the importance of radio equipment and other counter-insurgency items.

7. Our comments and recommendations re foregoing para follow in septel.