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Discussion of U.S. Government Activities Leading Up to the Chilean Election in September 1970. Held at State Department on 19 January 1970

Mr. John H. Crimmins

Mr. Frederic L. Chapin

Ambassador Wymberley Coerr

Mr. James R. Gardner

Ambassador Edward M. Korry

Mr. William V. Broe

[Name not declassified]

[Name not declassified]

[Name not declassified]

1. Mr. Crimmins started the meeting by saying that the purpose of getting together was to discuss the proposal to be made to the 303 Committee on U.S. Government activities in connection with the September 1970 election in Chile. He expressed his concern over the draft of the paper for the 303 Committee which the agency had sent over to State in December 1969. He described as his controlling concern the sensitization in Chile to U.S. “involvement” following General Viaux’ dramatic uprising at the Tacna regiment. This concern is intensified because of the particular sensitivity in Chile now to the CIA; another particular concern is the assumption in Chile that the U.S. would be pro-Alessandri and that, if the U.S. intervened in any way in the election, it would be to promote Alessandri. Mr. Crimmins went on to say that from the beginning he and Secretary Meyer have questioned the need for the U.S. to be involved in this election at all.

2. Ambassador Korry thought that Mr. Crimmins’ concerns were natural and useful, for the proposals to the 303 Committee needed this sort of examination and occasional review. Both the help to the Democratic Radical Party (PDR) and the propaganda work to be carried on through Mr. [name not declassified] “mechanism” could be interpreted as

pro-Alessandri, which is bothersome, said Ambassador Korry. Ambassador Korry went on to define the interest he sees for the U.S. in Chile: are we going to have a popular front or Marxist government in Latin America? Noting his own reluctance to engage in an operation that might have the effect of being pro-Alessandri, Ambassador Korry nevertheless felt that anything that serves to keep the left split is worthwhile. There was a discussion of how the help to the PDR would serve to take votes away from Allende, the presumed sole candidate of the left.

3. Mr. Crimmins defined the maximum objective of the U.S. as the collapse of the popular front effort and the splitting of this group into six different parties. Less than that would be the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PCCh) splitting off together and losing the support of the other four. Secondly, said Mr. Crimmins, the objective is to have the appeal of the popular front lessened, if there is to be one. Ambassador Korry offered a third objective: that of isolating the PCCh. In response to Mr. Crimmins' question of the current judgment on the voting, Ambassador Korry put their chances for winning as Alessandri, first, Allende, second, and Tomic, third. Noting that this can change, he thought that Alessandri would start with some 35% of the vote, Tomic with some 25%, leaving some 30% then to Allende and the front. Mr. Crimmins noted that this leaves some 10% undecided and Ambassador Korry agreed that some 10–15% of the vote is floating and crucial. Mr. Broe said that this is what made the proposal to the 303 Committee important.

4. Ambassador Coerr asked how Ambassador Korry would view an Allende victory. Ambassador Korry and Mr. [name not declassified] agreed that the Chilean military would accept this victory. The victory, Ambassador Korry continued, would weaken the Christian Democrats (PDC) and there would be serious internal divisions in the new government because of traditional Socialist and Communist rivalry for contact with the masses. A part of the PDC would then be attracted to the PS and would support Allende against the Communists. Ambassador Coerr commented that an Allende victory appears to be not the same as a Communist victory, in that case. Ambassador Korry agreed with this, but said that operationally one must treat an Allende victory as the same thing. At least, thought Ambassador Korry, it would be very imprudent to act as if an Allende government would be anything but another Castro government: it might be worse. When they say they will preserve personal liberty, for example, he doubts it. At least the press would be muzzled, he would predict.

5. Mr. Crimmins asked what difference it would make if we did not become involved, seeing how sensitive our involvement may be versus what we may gain from this involvement. Ambassador Korry noted that we can easily do nothing but we may have to ask ourselves, if Allende were to win, especially by a few votes, whether we might not better have become involved. Mr. Broe noted that if the CIA withdraws from what little the U.S. is doing now politically in Chile, this in itself would leave the impression that the U.S. Government is not interested in the fate of Chile. Mr. Crimmins suggested that this be explained to contacts in Chile as being on the basis of prudence rather than of indifference. Mr. Crimmins attempted to sum up the discussion at that point by saying that there is a chance that our efforts would influence a small but crucial margin of voters; that this operation can be conducted with justified expectations of considerable security; and that if we do not take this relatively secure opportunity to get this small margin of votes, we are vulnerable to the charge that we are not taking even marginal steps to prevent an Allende victory. Ambassador Korry noted that our negative decisions on military assistance and on a program loan have led to the belief in Chile that the U.S. is out of the picture and, while Chileans of all sectors welcome this disengagement by the U.S. in their affairs, we are nevertheless left with only this action to take: we are left "with a minimal action to be taken to minimize the minimal possibility."

6. There was considerable discussion of the security of the PDR arrangements and of the propaganda mechanism. While it was agreed that the PDR arrangements seem to be reasonably secure, and that the same could be said of the propaganda mechanism, which was described in some detail, concern was expressed by Mr. Crimmins and others that a pro-Alessandri content of the propaganda might overshadow the anti-popular front motive. Recognizing this as a legitimate concern, it was agreed that the product of this group must be monitored. Mr. [name not declassified] said that the terms of the

engagement with this mechanism, which he himself directs through two key people, are that the purpose is to maintain tension in the left camp, not to support Alessandri. Mr. [name not declassified] never “threatened” these people with the withdrawal of support, for he feels this threat to be unnecessary. It was agreed that our support would be withdrawn if a pro-Alessandri tone develops and becomes crucial.

7. The specific proposals to the 303 Committee were then discussed as (a) support to a [less than 1 line not declassified], (b) support to a PDR staff member, (c) support to the propaganda mechanism, (d) additional activity carried on from within the station [less than 1 line not declassified], such as the production of leaflets, a [less than 1 line not declassified], and the production of posters. These last activities have been going on for some time and will continue after the elections are over, noted Mr. Broe. Ambassador Korry felt that the one-shot opportunity approach should allow the embassy to make its decision to follow these up without having to come back for permission every time, and this was agreed to. Mr. Crimmins wanted the points concerning the agreement to cut off support to the PDR and support to the propaganda mechanism, if either becomes simply an Alessandri weapon, to be reflected in the 303 paper.