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Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)

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Nota de Archivo: *Washington. Source: National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Chile, 1971–72. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Printed from an unsigned copy. A March 8 covering memorandum from the Central Intelligence Agency Representative in the Office of the Secretary of Defense to the Deputy Director for Plans (through EA/DDP), indicates this memorandum was in response to Kissinger's invitation to make specific suggestions about covert actions in Chile. (Ibid.) See footnote 5, Document 283.*

Events in Chile

I am sure that you have followed reports on the significant victories by the opposition in the Chilean Congressional by-elections this past January indicating a declining popular support for the Allende government and its programs. Of particular importance is the report that these victories have focused opposition hopes on the 1973 Congressional elections as a way to check Allende in his attempt to bring about a fundamental and far-reaching restructuring of Chile.

While the prospects at present appear encouraging that the opposition in Chile may retain control of the Congress in 1973, such an event is still far from certain. As Ambassador Davis pointed out in his recent general review (Santiago 0953), the Marxists contend that the growing economic crisis need not be decisive for the Allende government if it can consolidate its control over the economy and work from that base to change the political balance in its favor. In fact, the continuing nationalization of Chilean firms and other economic measures are eroding the underpinnings of the opposition forces, including the news media and the opposition parties. Ambassador Davis' comment that: "In some ways we are witnessing a race between the deteriorating Chilean economic situation as a whole and the deteriorating economic situation of the opposition forces," is of special pertinence.

Because the retention of the democratic system in Chile depends primarily on the survival of an effective Chilean political opposition, we should take every available means to ensure the survivability and mobility of Chilean democratic forces opposing the Marxist socialist programs. This would parallel our overt actions underway to assist the Chilean military as a contining force to restrain the Allende government. In this context, therefore, I recommend that the 40 Committee give top priority to the development of an action plan that would provide for covert financial and material support as appropriate and necessary:

—To the key opposition political parties and their leaders.

—To the opposition news media, including radio and television.

—To certain independent publishing firms threatened by economic strangulation.

—To other current and potential foci of opposition, including the Chilean military and Carabineros.

—For accentuating the consequences of the economic crisis in Chile.

—For encouraging certain members of the Allende government to change or disrupt the course of the UP.

—For exposing in appropriate international channels the growing Soviet influence in Chile.

—For dissemination of information within Chile and Latin America on the economic failure caused by the Marxist programs of the Allende government.