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Memorandum for the Record

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Meeting on Current Chilean Situation at Department of State, 1630–1830, 17 October 1972

Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American AffairsCharles A. Meyer

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs John H. Crimmins

Mr. William J. Jorden, Senior Staff Member of the National Security Council

Mr. John W. Fisher, Director of Bolivian/Chilean Affairs, Department of State

Mr. James R. Gardner, Chief, Operations Policy Staff, Department of State

Mr. Theodore G. Shackley, Chief, WH Division

Mr. [name not declassified]

1. Mr. Meyer’s purpose in calling the meeting was to consider as a contingency, what the U.S. Government’s response should be if the opposition to Allende were to approach the Embassy or Station in Santiago with a request for (a) support in toppling the Allende government, or (b) an assurance of post-coup support as a prior condition for undertaking a coup, or, (c) U.S. Government commitment to post-coup support for a coup already arranged and decided upon. Since time would probably be a factor in responding to any such request, the Department of State felt it was necessary to have at least some preliminary discussion of the problems and options involved in this type of contingency.

2. Mr. Shackley noted that, earlier in the day, appropriate CIA elements had brainstormed the current Chilean situation from every conceivable angle. This had resulted in the conclusion that the most likely outcome in the current crisis was that a coup would not develop within the next few days. This conclusion was based on the estimate that the country would have to suffer a little more under Allende before the kind of consensus which would provoke the military into deciding on a coup would be reached among the main elements of the opposition—that is, the military, the political parties, and the private sector. It was stressed that up to 17 October, there had been absolutely no indication that General Carlos Prats, the Chilean Army Commander-in-Chief, was ready to do anything except maintain law and order and, in the process, support the constitutional Allende government. The point was also made that it was fairly obvious that the opposition political parties were reluctantly caught up in this wave of strikes and other actions against the government; essentially they started out supporting the strikes in order to preserve their credentials in the opposition. The private sector, in instigating the strikes which led to the current situation, had, and have, no clear goals but felt this was the only way to create a situation in

which the military and the political sectors would be forced to consider a coup against the Allende regime. Mr. Shackley concluded his assessment by stating that it is, of course, always possible that some action which could not be reasonably anticipated might take place and act as a catalyst for moving the military into a coup effort. As an example of this type of unforeseen occurrence he mentioned a clash between the security forces and students in which a number of students were killed. Short of that, however, the coup probabilities seemed quite low at this juncture. Mr. Shackley noted that in the course of the CIA brainstorming session, various courses of action had been examined to see if it were in the net interests of the United States to accelerate current Chilean events leading toward a coup. The conclusion was that no course of action which could be taken would help in a decisive manner to achieve the objective of removing Allende from power.

3. It was conceded by all that, in the final analysis, the Chilean military were the key to any coup that might develop now or in the future. Mr. Meyer dwelled on the question of what should the U.S. Government's reaction be to a query from the Chilean military on support under any of the possible coup-related circumstances in which this issue might be raised. Mr. Shackley indicated that, basically, what he felt the military would probably want in the aftermath of a coup would be: first, military hardware in order to sustain the takeover and maintain law and order in the face of reaction on the part of the radical UP supporters; secondly, financial assistance to achieve a level of liquidity which would permit the new government to function effectively; and, thirdly, the more traditional forms of aid in terms of food, loans, and so on, but on an accelerated basis. There was considerable discussion with Mr. Crimmins on the order of priority of the first two items listed by Mr. Shackley. In this connection, Mr. Shackley indicated that one of the prime military concerns would be what the MIR and radical wing of the PS have in the way of arms and, on that basis, their capability to generate a troublesome guerrilla situation in the rural areas, particularly in southern Chile. In the face of this concern, the current and increasingly critical shortage of spare parts, for such basics as tanks and communications, as well as the need for transportation to shift units around rapidly, could well be one of the early things to come up in any discussions with the military on post-coup support. In this connection, Mr. Shackley asked Mr. Crimmins if the Department would consider it appropriate to give a new military government the names and addresses of MIR and radical wing PS members in order to assist them in rolling up these elements as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Mr. Crimmins indicated that he would definitely be against that kind of U.S. Government support to a military junta.

5. The possibility of assistance being provided by countries other than the United States was discussed at some length. Several participants, including Mr. Shackley, felt Brazil would be willing to help the Chilean military in a post-coup situation, but Mr. Crimmins tended to discount Brazil's willingness to do so because of its political sensitivity to possible charges of having sponsored the coup. The possibility of various Western European countries or Japan assisting the Chilean military in this type of situation was also discussed and discounted. In the end it was the consensus that it would probably be most prudent to assume that the U.S. Government would have to shoulder the immediate support of a new Chilean government on its own and without collateral assistance.

6. The group finally did agree on the following:

a. If and when the Chilean military decided to undertake a coup, they would not need U.S. Government assistance or support to do so successfully nor are they likely to seek such support. Further, given the Chilean military capabilities for an unaided coup, any U.S. intervention or assistance in the coup per se should be avoided.

b. The Chilean military are more likely to seek advance assurance on the type of assistance the U.S. Government is prepared to provide for a new government in the post-coup era. In considering this latter possibility the Department of State representatives were ambivalent and concerned about the degree of complicity the U.S. Government might assume for the coup under such circumstances (particularly, if assurance of post-coup support were an implied or specific condition for the military to undertake the coup). The White House and CIA representatives had a more positive outlook on this point than did the Department of State since, among other things, a degree of complicity is already inherent in the

support presently being given the political opposition in Chile. (Mr. Jorden felt that the White House reaction to a Chilean request for assistance would be quite “forward-leaning.”) The Department of State felt it could probably support a statement to the military which would indicate that the U.S. Government bases its recognition policy on governments as they are and that, if the Chilean military had power, the U.S. Government would be helpful. Mr. Shackley said that CIA’s reading of the Chilean psychology was that they want to know in advance that they are operating with a sure thing and, on that basis, the Chilean military very probably would want reasonably specific and definite assurances of the type of support they could expect from the U.S. Government in the post-coup era. The discussion on this point ended inconclusively, but it was agreed that the group would take it up again at a later date.

6. Assuming a coup under any circumstances, there was a long discussion on what kind of support and assistance could be provided a Chilean military government, given the legal and other constraints facing the administration. Copper and other nationalization programs of the Allende government (which it was generally agreed that a new military government could not easily disavow) would be particularly troublesome since they generate all sorts of technical and legal inhibitions under the Hickenlooper and Gonzalez Amendments. It was agreed that even with the best of will and support on the part of the White House, Department of State, Department of Defense, and other interested agencies, real difficulties would be encountered in providing the range and tempo of assistance needed by, and possibly promised to, the new government. Mr. Meyer indicated that, in order to establish precisely what technical difficulties would be encountered and how they might be overcome, he had convoked on 17 October the working level members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Chile. He indicated that the Ad Hoc Committee on Chile would remain in session until it had examined all possibilities for assisting a post-coup Chilean government in the wider and less sensitive context of any type of government which might succeed Allende under any type of circumstances.