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Memorandum From William J. Jorden of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)

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Possible Coup in Chile

The attached special report from CIA (Tab A) suggests that the possibility of a coup in Chile has increased. Elements of the Chilean Air Force have worked out a plan to overthrow Allende. It envisions seizure of the Presidential palace by Air Force troops, supported by an armored battalion of the Army plus helicopters. Three commanders of key Army units in or around Santiago are said to be backing this effort. But officers of three other regimental-size units are said to be uncommitted if not opposed to any such action. The Navy and some Air Force units are reportedly in back of the effort.

There is no doubt that Chile's deepening problems have raised the likelihood of a coup. But I believe this report should be read with considerable skepticism. Several factors should be borne in mind:

—The Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Armed Forces, General Prats, is out of the country and an extreme action in his absence would do violence to the concept of military unity, so traditional in Chile.

—The Chilean military has historically been reluctant to involve itself in political activity in the absence of a clear and serious threat to order and public safety.

—An unsuccessful coup attempt could produce civil war in Chile, something that most if not all Chileans would do anything to avoid.

—It appears that several key elements in a possibly unsuccessful coup are missing from the plans as thus far reported—including the participation of strong Army elements in the Santiago area.

This bears watching carefully, and we will be doing that. But in the meantime, I do not think we should get too excited. Above all, there should be no effort to involve the U.S. in these developments in any way.