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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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Covert Support for Chilean Private Sector

As you know, we have been providing support to opposition political parties and [less than 1 line not declassified] elements of the media who oppose Marxist President Allende and his programs. This sustaining action has been highly useful in keeping democratic elements active and effective. In the attached memo, CIA suggests a new program that would expand our support to certain elements of the private sector—[3 lines not declassified]. This would move us into new territory, dealing with untested and much less sophisticated groups than we have been supporting. The purpose of the new program, which would be modest at the outset ([dollar amount not declassified] is suggested), would be "to keep the pressure on Allende and sustain some of the present strikes."

Ambassador Davis does not endorse the proposal. He believes this course of action could lead to a de facto U.S. commitment to a coup. He thinks the chances of exposure are significant and that those Chileans who learn of what is happening, or even suspect it, will take it as a signal that we want a coup. They will expect "more where that came from." And, with some military elements with whom they have contacts, be tempted into rash actions on the assumption that they would have quick and effective U.S. support.

The Ambassador believes (correctly) that present U.S. policy is to keep the pressure on, but not to take action in overthrowing Allende. He believes the new proposal would move us toward the latter.

Our present actions are well concealed. I am not persuaded that the newly suggested action would enjoy that same immunity. Moreover, I think there is high risk, not only of exposure, but of triggering events that could be bloody as well as ineffective. That is a bad combination.

It is not going to help us, or the opposition in Chile, if word gets around at this time that the U.S. is backing a coup. It would play into Allende's hands. One further consideration: a coup against Allende, however immediately attractive to us, will probably make a martyr of him in the eyes of many Chileans and leftists in the hemisphere. Meantime, he is presiding over the gradual but steady deterioration of Chile's economy and political order. This lesson has not been lost on other governments that, at one time, were inclined to look on the Chilean experience as a likely model for their future development. Now they are disillusioned. That attitude will deepen as Chile's downward spiral continues.

Thus, I see the issue as: Do we take a rather high-risk move that promises little real success but rather carries the danger of triggering bloodshed through misinterpretation—and may strengthen Allende's hand?

My recommendation is "no." But I would hold this proposal in reserve, a time may come when we can do it with less risk of exposure and without signalling "coup." We have an interest in keeping some of the groups concerned alive and well. This might require extending a helping hand between periods of crisis and high tension when their survival is most endangered. We also need better assurances from CIA that working with new and untested individuals and groups can be accomplished with relatively good security.

Thus, I would go back to Santiago with the message: "Not now. But let's keep the option open. We would be receptive to the Ambassador's and Mission's recommendation for implementation when they consider it would be helpful—without giving a misleading signal as to our support for a violent solution."

Dick Kennedy concurs. Jack Kubisch also supports this course.

Recommendation

That you approve a message to Santiago along the lines of the previous paragraph.