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Minutes of a Meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group

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Nota de Archivo: *Washington. Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–94, WSAG Meeting, Chile 9/12/73. Secret; Nodis. Jeanne Davis sent the minutes to Kissinger under cover of a September 13 memorandum. A copy was sent to Eagleburger, Kennedy, and Jorden. (Ibid.) The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. The minutes were misdated September 13; an unknown hand corrected the date to September 12. Kissinger's Record of Schedule confirms that the WSAG met on September 12 at 10:10 a.m. (and not on September 13.)*

Chile

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Kenneth Rush

Jack Kubisch

Defense

V/Adm. Ray Peet

Robert F. Corrigan

JCS

V/Adm. John Weinel

CIA

William Colby

David Phillips

NSC

B/Gen. Brent Scowcroft

Lawrence Eagleburger

Richard Kennedy

William Jorden

Jeanne W. Davis

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

. . . a comprehensive paper should be prepared by AID and Treasury, with CIA assistance, on what is needed by way of economic assistance and the options on debt rescheduling;

. . . Ambassador Davis should inform the new regime that we are well-disposed toward it, but that it would not be in our mutual interest if we were the first country to recognize it;

. . . we should take the public position that we recognize governments, not heads of government, and that question of recognition has not arisen; if asked, we should deny any CIA involvement; if asked, we should say our defense equipment programs are continuing on a routine basis and that anything going to Chile is in fulfillment of existing obligations undertaken with the Allende government;

. . . Ambassador Davis should raise with the Chileans the visit of the Air Force Thunderbirds;

. . . the President will be asked for a decision on the US ships involved in Exercise UNITAS;

. . . our Ambassador in Rio should discuss the situation with the Brazilian Government;

. . . CIA will prepare a paper for Mr. Kissinger on activities in Chile over the last three years.

Mr. Kissinger: The principal purpose of this meeting is just to be sure we all say the same thing and that we all know where we are going. (to Mr. Colby) Would you brief us?

Mr. Colby briefed from the attached text.

Mr. Kissinger: Do we have communications, or were they cut?

Mr. Colby: We have communications.

Mr. Kissinger: (in response to a briefing comment that Admiral Leigh disliked the Christian Democrats) Whom does he like?

Mr. Colby: He’s to the right of the Christian Democrats—favors the Nationalists.

Mr. Kissinger: (In response to a comment in the briefing) Why did the Chileans attack a Cuban ship leaving Valparaiso?

Mr. Colby: They thought it might have some of Allende’s people on it.

Mr. Rush: Wasn’t it violating the military’s order that no ships should leave port?

Mr. Colby: Yes.

Mr. Rush: Haven’t the Cubans been supplying some arms to Allende? They might have had some arms aboard.

Mr. Colby: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Rush) Does State have any observations?

Mr. Rush: We think this offers us an opportunity to avoid what happened after Goulart was deposed in Brazil in 1964. At that time the President sent cables of congratulations to the new government immediately and everything we did made it

appear that we were behind the coup.

Mr. Kissinger: The President is worried that we might want to send someone to Allende's funeral. I said I didn't believe we were considering that.

Mr. Rush: No, not unless you want to go. We think we have a real opportunity to keep our hands off and to develop really good relations with the new government. It would be in our best interests not to be a part of it or even appear to be a part of it. It was a true national effort. The chances are that they will probably turn first to Brazil for aid, and we think this would be good for us, too. I should mention Exercise UNITAS which is a joint US-Chilean naval exercise with three U.S. destroyers and one submarine involved.

Mr. Kissinger: But there were no American ships anywhere near Chile, were there?

Mr. Rush: Their next stop was to be Santos on October 2. I think the ships should go back up north.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree.

Mr. Kubisch: The biggest errors we have made in Latin America in recent years have involved too hasty recognition of military regimes—in Brazil, for example. Also, this has created the biggest handicap for the country concerned. I believe we have twin objectives. This promises to be a very effective government. I think, privately, we should be forthcoming and cooperative and do what we can to help stabilize their economy and give them the assistance they need. Publicly, we should avoid a too quick, affectionate embrace and any impression that we had any involvement in the change. An allegation that American ships were in Chilean waters can do considerable damage for years to come.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree. (to Adm. Weinel) What do you think?

Adm. Weinel: Chilean waters don't go all the way to Australia. I don't think every time there is a coup that it should influence our right to the high seas.

Mr. Kissinger: This isn't a question of our right to the high seas. This is the question of risk of an act of choice; how it will look if there is a pro-American coup, or at least one favorable to the US, to have American ships nearby.

Adm. Weinel: That might not be a bad conclusion to draw in certain areas.

Mr. Kissinger: But not in Chile.

Adm. Weinel: I was thinking of third countries.

Mr. Kissinger: We'll get credit for this anyway.

Mr. Colby: More than we want.

Mr. Kissinger: But that's not the worst disaster that could befall.

Adm. Peet: Our ships would be out of sight—over 200 miles off the coast. Their presence would give us some options if we wanted them.

Mr. Kissinger: To do what?

Adm. Weinel: This is a political decision entirely.

Mr. Kissinger: I can't conceive of a circumstance in which three destroyers would be used, no matter what happens. Where are they now?

Adm. Weinel: They're on their way to Cape Horn—just south of the Peruvian border.

Mr. Rush: We want as little civil war on resistance in Chile as possible. We don't want to give the various sides any excuse for lining up against each other. We want even the anti-American groups to back the new regime.

Mr. Kubisch: There was an AP report this morning of an Angela Davis rally in which she said US naval vessels were off the coast of Chile. When Defense was queried about it, they said there was a joint naval exercise with Chile but it had been cancelled. I don't think we should say there was any US navy off the coast.

Mr. Rush: Allende is scheduled to become a martyr. That's why he committed suicide.

Mr. Kissinger: Losers don't become martyrs in Latin America.

Mr. Rush: Some do.

Mr. Kissinger: Who?

Mr. Corrigan: Che Guevara.

Mr. Kissinger: Did Allende really commit suicide or was he killed?

Mr. Colby: Our evidence points to suicide.

Mr. Kissinger: I have just spoken to the President on recognition. He agrees we should not rush in as the first country to recognize. Hopefully a Latin American country would be the first, but we should encourage them to do so.

Mr. Rush: In the cases of Afghanistan and the coup in Greece that deposed Constantine we just said the issue didn't arise.

Mr. Kissinger: Do we have to recognize?

Mr. Rush: No.

Mr. Kubisch: It's a constitutional question. If the new regime is constitutional the President of the Senate, who is Frei, becomes President and elections are held within 90 days. If it is unconstitutional there are supposed to be consultations.

Mr. Kissinger: Do we have to interpret the Chilean constitution?

Mr. Kubisch: No.

Mr. Kissinger: We could wait for one or two Latin American countries to recognize then try to get one or two European countries, and possibly, Japan, to join us in recognition.

Mr. Corrigan: I just went through a coup situation in Rwanda which was completely unconstitutional but applauded by all. The Germans, French, etc. all said they recognized countries, not governments. You will have no problem with them.

Mr. Kissinger: We can say that too.

Mr. Kubisch: They need to ask for recognition—to say they want to continue or renew diplomatic relations with us.

Mr. Kissinger: What instructions does (Ambassador) Davis have?

Mr. Kubisch: To report any contact from the new government.

Mr. Rush: When they contact us, we will recognize them.

Mr. Kubisch: But we shouldn't be among the first.

Mr. Kissinger: We're all shell-shocked here by Senator Church and the press. Does Davis understand he can let the government know we are well disposed toward it?

Mr. Kubisch: He can do it informally.

Mr. Kissinger: Just so he doesn't say, when they approach him, that he will have to check with Washington. He could say he will have to get instructions on the formalities. He could also say that for our common interest we would like not to be the first to recognize.

Adm. Weinel: Isn't this a special type of coup—this isn't your regular garden-variety Latin American coup. Isn't there a connection between the type of coup and the nature of our recognition?

Mr. Rush: We could save a lot of trouble if we have a policy of recognizing governments, not heads of governments. In that case, nothing is called for. In a low key, we could just resume relations.

Mr. Kissinger: The major problem would be if Davis takes a hands-off attitude when they approach him. That might put them off. Let's have him tell them now that we are well-disposed to them and want to be helpful. Our preference is to treat the situation so as to make no new action necessary. We will take a low-key public posture.

Mr. Rush: Exactly. We'll get a cable off at once.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's get a look at it. We have a press briefing today. What do we say?

Mr. Kubisch: That this is an internal development in Chile. That the US is watching it closely. That there has been no damage to American property or harm to American citizens.

Mr. Kissinger: And if they ask if we will recognize this government, we will say the issue is not raised. That our basic position is that we recognize countries, not heads of governments, and that we need more information before we can be more specific.

Mr. Colby: And we should say that CIA did not stimulate or support the coup.

Mr. Kissinger: Only in answer to a question. If asked about supply of military equipment, we should say we are continuing shipments of all regularly scheduled equipment which was based on agreements made with the Allende government. We should say nothing new has been added to our existing programs. If questioned on CIA, say they had nothing to do with it. But don't stimulate a question.

Mr. Colby: God, no!

Mr. Rush: What about UNITAS?

Mr. Kissinger: I'll get an answer from the President on that within a half-hour.

Adm. Weinel: We can say our ships are completely clear of Chilean waters.

Mr. Kubisch: This could be a plus. Our ships had already set sail from port to meet with the Chilean Navy units, and when we learned of the coup we cancelled their orders.

Mr. Kissinger: Why not say so? That this was a regular exercise; that our ships were supposed to meet Chilean ships, but when we heard about the coup we cancelled their orders.

Mr. Kubisch: On the question of recognition, we could base our position on the establishment of relations with a new government, not recognition. We are waiting for the new government to establish itself and to approach us.

Mr. Kissinger: For today, I think it best to set our philosophical position. We recognize the governing body of the country. We took that position recently in Afghanistan and in Greece. The specific issue hasn't arisen in Chile since the Chilean authorities have not yet contacted our Embassy.

Mr. Colby: This is consistent with our relations with China.

Mr. Rush: That's the best thing to say. We don't have to take a definitive step.

Mr. Kissinger: Our defense programs will continue on a routine basis. We will fulfill all obligations undertaken with the Allende government. Anything going to Chile is in fulfillment of existing obligations.

Adm. Peet: We have some LSTs and trucks going. Also, on September 25, we were scheduled to send the Thunderbirds there—an Air Force demonstration flight team.

Adm. Weinel: That's a very high-visibility item.

Adm. Peet: Should we cancel it?

Mr. Kissinger: If we cancel it now, won't it look like a slap in the face? Has it been announced?

Adm. Peet: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: What is the occasion?

Adm. Weinel: It is part of a tour of South American countries, not just Chile.

Mr. Rush: We shouldn't not do for this government what we were prepared to do for Allende.

Mr. Kissinger: Why don't you raise it again in a week. Ask Davis to raise it with the Chileans. They will certainly ask for economic aid. Can we get a paper from AID and from Treasury. They have a debt rescheduling problem.

Mr. Colby: Yes, a bad problem.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Gen. Scowcroft) Let's get a paper from Treasury on the options on the debt. State should get from AID what is needed in the way of economic assistance. Then we'll decide how to do it.

Mr. Colby: They have enough flour for a month or so, then they will have to import more.

Mr. Kissinger: Have we any flour to give them?

Mr. Kubisch: They have asked Argentina for wheat, and they have some for them. It would be better if they can get as much multilateral support as possible.

Mr. Kissinger: As long as the Chileans understand that we are the driving force behind the multilateral assistance.

Mr. Rush: Multilateral assistance never appealed to me too much. If they ask us, we should respond on our own and get the credit for it.

Mr. Kubisch: I meant we should cooperate with the Australians and the Argentinians and others to see they get flour if they need it, but all bilaterally. One-third of the country is still pro-Allende. The new regime won't want to get too closely associated with us.

Mr. Kissinger: That's their decision. If they want bilateral aid from us we shouldn't say they should seek multilateral aid.

Mr. Kubisch: Right.

Mr. Kissinger: Should we talk to the Brazilians about this? Do they still have that Ambassador here?

Mr. Kubisch: Yes, Castro.

Mr. Kissinger: Maybe it would be better to talk in Brazil.

Mr. Kubisch: Yes, Crimmins could talk to Gibson Barboza.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's get a comprehensive paper from Treasury and AID so that not every agency is sending stuff in separately. I agree we shouldn't look like we are pouring aid in. We should also get something from CIA.

Mr. Kubisch: One problem is the question of uncompensated expropriation. We should make it clear that we want to establish some good faith negotiations.

Mr. Kissinger: It would not be in the US interest to get them to reverse too much. I doubt they will, anyhow. We should not come back in as the American exploiters, but they should be made to understand what we are after. We'll have a brief meeting on Friday.

Adm. Peet: We have 300 Chileans in various military training programs, some in the Canal Zone and some in the US.

Mr. Kissinger: Just don't send any back right now. (to Mr. Colby) Could you send me what we have done in the last three years there so I have all the facts. State should make sure that Davis and we don't protest too much. What Mr. Kubisch has described is just right.

Mr. Kubisch: Our policy on Allende worked very well.

Mr. Kissinger: We'll get the credit for this anyway. We'll meet Friday at the same time.

Adm. Weinel: What about the ships? Should they turn around?

Mr. Kissinger: I'll check with the President, but my guess is that he will want them to turn around.