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Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Chile (Korry) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Crimmins)

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[message number not declassified]. For Crimmins from Korry.

1. Permit me three quick comments on the “fourth option.”

A. Since I see very little possibility of a duly-elected and inaugurated Allende being overthrown, I do not regard the fourth “option” as a very realistic alternative.

B. This option should be realistically considered only within the framework of Phase Two, i.e. after the elections and prior to inauguration.

C. The prohibitions imposed by the Dept on this Emb in dealing with Phase Two make my following comments of dubious value since they do not encompass firm knowledge of the thinking of key men.

2. If Allende is inaugurated by constitutional process, it is the CT estimate that it is highly unlikely that the conditions or motivations for a military overthrow of Allende will prevail. Military implies Army since without the explicit or implicit support of the Army, the others (Carabineros, Navy and Air Force) can do nothing coherent. Once Congress elected Allende, the breakdown of law and order to a condition of chaos could be the only effective impulse for Army intervention. For such chaos to ensue, the supporters of Alessandri would have to foment a serious and coordinated challenge to the Frei government’s authority and Frei would have to play the deliberate role of impotent or conniver. While such a scenario is not impossible, it is highly unlikely once the Congress elects Allende. An attempt to rob Allende of his triumph by, say, a General Viaux, who has a certain mystique within the Army, would in all likelihood fail in a post-congressional decision period and be almost impossible post-inauguration unless Allende imprudently and unexpectedly aroused Army animus by flouting its institutionality.

3. In considering all the permutations, three separate time frames must be kept in view: Sept. 5 to Oct. 24 when the Congress begins its electoral deliberations; from Nov. 4 on when Allende is President.

4. Further assumptions re possible military influences or actions include that Allende finishes first by a margin of less than 100,000, or that he finishes second by less than 100,000. (If he has the first majority by more than 100,000 it will be almost impossible for Congress to overturn his election and equally unlikely that intervention by anything except death could halt his inauguration and Presidency; alternatively if he loses by more than 100,000, he has little hope of overturning the electoral order; if his forces sought to do so, it is likely they would be frustrated first in the Congress and if not there then

possibly by military intervention.)

5. Doubtless there are many active officers personally opposed to the idea of an Allende Presidency. The DAO has reported his views and [less than 1 line not declassified] has put forward the coincidental names of Gen Valenzuela (in Santiago) and Gen Prats (the Army CG). To which could be added Carabinero CG Huerta, FACH CG Guerratty, Navy CINC Porta and a considerable number of other officers. However we are not considering views but the will and the capacity to act and to control.

6. The dominant figure in the Army today is Gen. Schneider. The Schneider doctrine of non-intervention and of acceptance of the Congressional decision to name either of the first two candidates has been widely accepted. Schneider is the one Chilean General for whom Frei said to me he holds any respect. I am persuaded Schneider made his controversial statement with the full knowledge if not prompting of Frei; I am further persuaded that one purpose was to maintain the institutional unity of the Army at a difficult time (and with a Viaux in the wings) and that this aim is increasingly understood within the Army; I am convinced that Schneider had Tomic in mind as possible second or Allende as a first when he issued his statement and wished to keep open options. The Frei–Schneider relationship is therefore a crucial element about which we know little.

7. The Frei–Schneider gambit to help Tomic and to keep the Army united and apolitical has increased the pressures on the politicians who will have to vote in Congress starting Oct. 24th. It should mean that the Army will guarantee order until that vote starts and that it will not rpt not permit mob muscle to disrupt the constitutional process.

8. If my assumptions about the Frei–Schneider relationship are correct, then if Allende should win the first majority by less than 100,000, the more or less united Army will assure at least an opportunity for the Congress to block Allende's ascendancy by election of the runner up. It is conceivable too that the Army might take certain symbolic actions following the congressional vote to put its stamp of approval on the newly chosen President prior to inauguration.

9. It is significant that Frei has told visitors that if Allende wins the first majority there will be a "golpe de estado" (without defining if the Armed Forces would act unilaterally or on his urging). Without any factual substantiation, I believe this leaking to be electoral in purpose. I guess that Frei is spreading the word in order to affect the Sept. 4th voting and that he has calculated that both the international press and the Marxist-Leninists here would publicize this possibility as indeed both have. I reckon Frei believes that this propaganda-conjuring might dissuade some disposed to vote for Allende. It could conceivably mean what he says but I have no rpt no evidence in support.

10. The conditions that currently prevail in the Army make doubtful any effective Army move to block Allende. While younger officers might want action for action's sake, and while some might accurately calculate that such action would doubtless lead to greater responsibility, greater power and greater status, there is doubt about the troops' willingness to follow their officers for such a purpose and there is said to be considerable Allende sentiment among the non-coms or at the very minimum an unwillingness to obstruct him. The partisan factionalism of higher officers acts to reinforce their general reluctance and incapacity to govern.

11. In order to reverse this outlook, a group of officers would be required to (A) plan an effective takeover without the knowledge of Schneider or the GOC and (B) exploit a contrived or unexpected opportunity that could be accepted by a significant part of the Army and public as a rationale for a golpe. While the Perez-Zujoviches and a good many Alessandristas are playing with this idea, I think it a non-starter without the blessing of Frei, implicit or explicit, and without outside support in the form of technical assistance or political action. (We are excluding any foreign troop hypothesis.)

12. While all sorts of Caribbean cabals can be plotted and we have indulged in spinning some out, they strike me as fanciful and really unplannable because of the Army's condition and because of Chile particularities. I remain unswayed in my view that Frei is a critical and dominant figure, not only because he is President but because he is the most popular and therefore the most influential politician in Chile. This judgment should not be read as implying that Frei has the guts to take hard decisions; indeed, his proclivity is to transact and to avoid unpleasantness unless he is pushed.

13. That comment leads me to Phase Two. The crucial period is Sept. 5 to Oct. 24 when various pertinent possibilities will occur:

A. If we assume Allende has won by less than 100,000, then his supporters have a keen interest in avoiding any military intervention that would rob them of their electoral triumph. If Tomic were second, Allende could only be blocked from the Presidency by the Nacionales and/or dissident Radicals voting for Tomic. Frei would pull out all stops for Tomic and would, I predict, seek our and the Army's support in applying pressures.

B. If Alessandri were second, we face an extraordinary stem-winder. Alessandri has said that he will accept the winner of the first majority as definitive. The Nacionales have said they would vote for the man who had the first majority. Thus these pledges would have to be ignored and moreover the PDC would have to throw their votes to Alessandri as well if Allende were not to become President. Senate President Tomas Pablo (PDC) came uninvited to the residence Sunday Aug 9 to speculate inter alia on this hypothetical situation. He noted that if Alessandri were elected by Congress, the old man could keep his electoral pledge to respect the first majority by refusing to accept the Presidency. (Alessandri has always said he would not seek to govern without effective support and such renunciation would also be consistent with this view.) If Alessandri refused the Congressional will, then, according to Pablo, new elections would have to be called with the President of the Senate acting as interim President. Frei would be a candidate in the new election and would surely win an overwhelming majority (and Pablo would have reached the heights by being registered in history as one of Chile's Presidents). In other words, there would be a deal between Nacionales and PDC to block Allende and to re-elect Frei. The support of Schneider and the Army in the face of certain Marxist mob violence, general strikes and MIR crimes would, of course, be essential. So would our financial resources, intelligence data, and covert moral support.

C. If Allende were to finish second within 100,000 votes of Alessandri, the problem is no less complex. There would be perhaps a third of the Christian Democrats (that is up to 25) in the Congress disposed to vote for Allende and there might be some orthodox Radicals prepared to abandon Allende in the secret ballot. Unless Frei and his lieutenants were to exercise all of their influence within the Party and unless all levers of pressure were brought to bear on the Radicals, the Allende forces would prevail. (Perhaps this is the place to interpose a judgment on Tomic. If he finishes well behind the other two, Frei's influence in the PDC will be considerable; but if Tomic is third by a comparatively small number of votes the recriminations against Frei by the Tomicistas will be bitter and their inclinations (including Tomic's) to fight Frei and to help Allende will be very powerful.)

14. No one here can conceive of any supportable scheme for a U.S. role strictly limited to the military for reasons given above. And without a U.S. tactical role, we find it difficult to suggest what the Argentines might do; they wish us to tell time.

15. But as I said at the outset, the military hypothesis must be seen as part of Phase Two. There, I continue to believe that the U.S. does have an opportunity to play a constructive and effective role in which the military would be included. It is because we have the power to influence that Senate President Pablo came to the residence to emphasize his worrisome responsibilities and to fret over the various hypothetical alternatives. While I could not satisfy his desires because of the Dept's prohibitions, I did use the opportunity to state in very forceful terms my personal convictions that an Allende govt would signify a Marxist-Leninist system in Chile, a view that Pablo did not rpt not share at the outset of our conversation.

He did say that Frei was firmly convinced as to the overriding necessity to keep out Allende. I have no idea (nor did Pablo) how Frei proposes to do so and the President will surely not volunteer that information to one who merely seeks information as a passive observer.

16. Moreover, I doubt that he has yet fixed on any plan. He is receiving too many optimistic PDC reports about Tomic's chances—from PDCers of all stripes—to have ruled out the possibility that Tomic will yet make a real run in the elections. There is no longer any doubt whatsoever that Frei is working flat out for Tomic and that he now sees the faint possibility of Tomic edging out Allende or Alessandri for second place because of the impact of the Castro July 26th speech added to other well-known factors. He is playing the anti-Marxist side of the street while Tomic sings his familiar Popular Unity tune of the other side. From Cabinet Ministers who accompanied Frei on the 12 hour inauguration of El Teniente's expansion Saturday, I heard urgings that the Castro admission of failure be played to the hilt.

17. Pablo told me that the critical time frame will be the first fortnight after the elections when the bidding for congressional votes begins. If we are to influence that bidding we shall have to be prepared to act promptly on Sept 5 and to take our decisions now.

18. [3 lines not declassified] I share the Dept's desire to protect the President and the Embassy to the maximum extent from any exposure. My own view is that the usual alternatives—[1½ lines not declassified]—would be incompatible with the situation and more risky of failure and exposure than anything I might do. To reconcile these two preoccupations, I would suggest the following:

A. [1 paragraph (1½ lines) not declassified]

B. [1 paragraph (2 lines) not declassified]

C. [1 paragraph (4 lines) not declassified]

D. [1 paragraph (3½ lines) not declassified]

19. [1 paragraph (1 line) not declassified]

A. [1 paragraph (3½ lines) not declassified]

B. [1 paragraph (3½ lines) not declassified]

C. [1 paragraph (1 line) not declassified]

D. [1 paragraph (½ lines) not declassified]

E. [1 paragraph (1½ lines) not declassified]

20. The point of this proposal is to make the effort a Chilean one and to reduce U.S. exposure potential to the minimum. [4 lines not declassified]