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Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Meyer) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson)

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Options in Chilean Presidential Election

Attached is a CIA formulation of covert options open to us to influence the choice of a president in Chile after the general elections on 4 September and before the Chilean Congress on 24 October selects a winner from the two leading contenders. The proposals for action, all aimed at preventing an Allende victory, would have no applicability unless Allende ran first or second on 4 September. Nor would they have practical effect unless Allende were a close winner or a close loser on 4 September; our Embassy in Santiago supports the view that if Allende wins the general elections by more than 100,000 votes there is no course open to us that would prevent Congress from choosing him, and that if Alessandri (or, almost inconceivably, Tomic) won by a similar margin he would almost surely be chosen.

The options open to us if Allende is a close contender are framed by CIA as follows:

1) Take no action.

2) Take limited action by continuing the present propaganda campaign or by acting directly to influence the congressional vote, or both. Ambassador Korry supports the combined approach. The instrumentality for this work with Congress would be [1 line not declassified], whom CIA has used in the past and whose discretion it trusts, as does Ambassador Korry. Execution of the project could be entirely “sublet” to [name not declassified] or CAS could participate closely in the formulation, guidance and control of the enterprises [name not declassified] undertakes. In either case [name not declassified] would coordinate his activities with both Frei and Alessandri; he would put pressure on and pay “persuadable” Congressmen; and he would monitor the attitudes of the Chilean military. The CIA paper suggests that if the project were sublet to [name not declassified] he might be paid an initial [dollar amount not declassified] and another [dollar amount not declassified] if Allende lost.

3) Broaden (2) by acting also with other covert assets in the political parties and in the military. This course, the Agency notes, would have more risks without appreciably increasing our leverage on Congress.

The Agency says that the “slightest revelation” that we were undertaking political action against the Chilean Congress would mean a certain Allende victory and would seriously affect U.S. credibility in the world at large. The Agency sees much less risk in a continuation of the propaganda campaign, which thus far has showed itself to be a secure operation.

Continuation of the propaganda campaign would cost about [dollar amount not declassified] attempts to influence Congress [dollar amount not declassified] use of further “broad option” assets [less than 1 line not declassified]. Total cost: [dollar amount not declassified].

The Agency asks that the Committee direct which option it wishes followed; and whether direct contact with Chileans is authorized in order to get the intelligence required for a political action program.

ARA–INR/DDC Appraisal

The propaganda campaign was authorized by the Committee in June; it is in full swing and apparently has not been compromised. ARA and INR/DDC are in no position to say that it has been ineffective. We therefore have no objection to its continuation. We do oppose the proposal (even were it successful) to work directly on Congressmen, a proposal that plainly has as its central intent the purchase of Congressional votes.

Ambassador Korry has emphasized, and ARA and INR/DDC are well aware of, the grim consequences to U.S. interests of an Allende victory. (The Ambassador does note that some observers, including Alessandri himself, take a more moderate view of the future were Allende to win.) Buying Congressional votes, however, is a qualitatively different matter from the political action we have previously undertaken in Chile. It means interference with and corruption of a principal institution of the Chilean Government and of a constitutional function that lies at the heart of the Chilean political process. The gravity of a step of the sort proposed makes the costs of exposure proportionately high. Were the operation exposed, we assess the damage to USG domestic and world credibility as being unjustifiably great.

We take a different view of the risk of exposure than does Ambassador Korry. We think it prohibitively high. The principal if not the only instrument for our action with Congress would be [name not declassified]. The Embassy and [less than 1 line not declassified] affirm the highest confidence in his discretion, [1 line not declassified] ARA and INR/DDC, on the other hand, fear that [name not declassified] has become sufficiently identified with the USG that untoward political activities or expenditures on his part would give color to suspicions, charges, and ready belief that he was acting as a U.S. agent. [8 lines not declassified]

The buying of congressional votes is a far more sensitive operation than a propaganda campaign, and would have penalties for disclosure far more heavy and wide-ranging. [1 line not declassified] ARA and INR/DDC recommend strongly against putting the reputation of the administration and of the U.S. into the hands of one Chilean citizen, who, although he has justified our confidence hitherto by not revealing our part in covert political action, [1 line not declassified].

Even were we to reach 24 October uncompromised, the risk of exposure would continue. Were Allende to lose, there would be, for example, risk from Congressmen whose votes [name not declassified] so closely linked with the US, sought to buy. Were Allende victorious, the risk would be much greater, because of the possibility that he might crack, and furnish evidence of our role in the Congressional election, to avoid physical or financial retribution.

Recommendation

That we limit our covert activity after the 4 September general elections to continuation of the anti-Allende propaganda campaign, at a cost not to exceed [dollar amount not declassified] the amount and the manner of expenditure to be determined by the Ambassador.

Clearance:

INR—Mr. Cline. Mr. Cline, in clearing this memorandum, states that if CIA considers [name not declassified] reliable and secure, and if CIA can get [name not declassified] to outline his individual projects so that we can judge their feasibility, he

would invest [dollar amount not declassified] if that would make the difference between an Allende victory or defeat. Mr. Cline believes that by the time leaks come, if they do, the issue would be over.