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Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

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3483. Subject: Election Eve Talk with Frei.

1. (Summary) I met with President Frei at his invitation for three hours last night in home on Santiago's outskirts of Minister of State Raul Troncoso (whose office is few feet from President's). We discussed election prospects, his concern over military plotting, his mild suspicions of US military intentions, his good relations with US, his successful intervention at my behest to stop or delay NY Times publication today of provocative story concerning Pentagon contingency planning behind State Department's back, and pessimistic prospects in Chile. Dept should bear in mind that when Troncoso called me previous evening to extend invitation, I seized opportunity to alarm deliberately President re impending Times story on US Navy. This message includes recommendations for prompt Presidential cable to Frei on elections and suggestions for Dept's handling of Times. (End summary).

2. I recalled that "no wind works for the man who has no port of destination" as I talked with a Frei who pragmatically recognizes that the fate of Chile is in the hands of the more than 3,000,000 Chileans who are voting today. Still the powerfully attractive man I have always found him to be, still the total politician who revels in the game, still as pragmatically realistic as befits one of the few PDC leaders who has kept a true democracy functioning, he was nonetheless profoundly pessimistic and perturbed. He paced the entire three hours in the small living room, stepping over my ungainly limbs as he went round and round the coffee table, puffing on the two missled Cuban Churchills or sipping from the one defused scotch he consumed.

3. He had barely entered when he asked with characteristic forthrightness: who is going to win; I replied that I believed Alessandri would gain no less than 38 pct, that Allende could not realistically hope for more than 35 pct and that Tomic might surprise the Marxists by squeezing in second, thus making it a tighter all round race. For a few moments he sank into a morose silence, the most visibly affected in my experience of three years.

4. Finally he began to play with the numbers and their implications. He had no great love for Tomic and he disagreed with his policies almost totally. Nonetheless he was profoundly convinced that the triumph of either Alessandri or Allende would be far worse for Chile. An Allende triumph would without any doubt mean the imposition of a Marxist-Leninist state. It was an irreversible road; it was the end for Chile and it was the end for him and for everything he had labored. An Alessandri government would lead to rapid polarization of Chile; it would push the mass of the Christian Democrats to the left; it would destroy the center; Alessandri was himself a smart politician but he was surrounded by so-called "Independents" whose avarice was only equalled by their stupidity and arrogance; the latter would quickly settle back into their business-as-usual attitudes and seek vengeance on the Christian Democrats by offering the Communists a free hand in

the universities and trade unions in return for a pledge of labor peace; they would halt Frei's kind of land reform and accompanying measures and would destroy the painfully fashioned canals of social progress and justice he had constructed as a diversion from Marxism and violence.

5. He had no animus against Alessandri. But the fact was that as President in 1958 to 1964, Alessandri had worked barely four hours a day. Chile had become far more complex, although nothing in comparison with the complexity that President Nixon had to confront; a Chilean President who did not follow closely all that transpired could not steer a purposeful or steady course. He would be manipulated by a small group of cronies whose sole interest was their individual interests. As for those who speculated that Alessandri might not long survive, he felt that men with the ex-President's history of psychiatric problems and with his degree of nervousness usually outlived their doctors.

6. Tomic had made the profound error of tactically assuming Alessandri would not stay the course; Tomic had thought less about being elected than of resolving the problems of governing via his electoral campaign. Only very lately, he had realized the possibility of error but it was probably too late to rectify. Frei said he was never more uncertain about an election. He would not be surprised if any of the three won or even if there were an absolute draw among the three. What I had told him was very upsetting because he genuinely believed that I was the best political observer of Chile and that he had waited until election eve to hear my conclusions because he wished them to be the ultimate, particularly because he was bombarded by such conflicting reports.

7. He had hoped against hope that Tomic had a good chance. If he finished third, it would be universally interpreted as a rejection of all that he (Frei) and his government had sought to accomplish. From all over the non-Leninist world, he had been given nothing but high marks for his regime—from countries as different as Yugoslavia and Japan, Israel and France, Spain and the US, West Germany, Britain, Italy and all the others. How could anyone explain that good government and personal popularity resulted in such a defeat and in such frightening perspectives for the country?

8. I sought to provide consoling answers. Everyone knew he would win in a landslide if he were running; everyone knew that Tomic had spurned his whole-hearted efforts to help; everyone knew and would also write that it was Tomic's tactics and personality that had been the primary causes of defeat, if indeed it were to be defeat. The latest indications were that Tomic was gaining last-minute strength with the populous Central Valley campesinos, that he was making equal inroads among middle-class women and low income groups in Santiago and that he could yet make a run for it. The President commented that it would be less deplorable if Tomic at least finished second. He believed that whoever won by 100,000 votes would be President although he said that some in the PDC would stretch that margin of interpretation, if Tomic were second. If Allende were first, Congress would not elect Alessandri. He saw little possibility, contrary to US press speculation, that the PDC and Popular Unity forces could make an effective alliance to overturn an Alessandri victory.

9. He was much more concerned about the military. He had received word that day that for the first time truly alarmed him about the military's intentions. He had fairly hard information that a plot was well developed to have the army seize power if Alessandri lost. I interrupted to ask if he meant a plot contingent on Allende's victory. No, he repeated, his information was that this group intended to move too if Tomic triumphed. He said the information provided him was the most serious and the most disturbing about the army in his entire six years in office and he included last October's fuss in the army. I asked if he was talking about the leader of the October dissidence, Gen. Viaux. No, Viaux was not a serious menace although he was very active. Well, I inquired, who then? He said he would prefer to have his information double-checked before mentioning names but he could say well-placed active officers supported by some retired personnel were involved. Comment: We have no rpt no intelligence to support the President's statement. There are to my knowledge advanced plans involving the service and Carabinero chiefs to solidify an Alessandri triumph by a prompt symbolic act of recognition. Frei points in quite another direction and for the moment I must consider it with skeptical reservations. While there are officers committed to Alessandri who regard Tomic as indistinguishable from Allende, they do not, to the best of our knowledge,

represent any effective force that could mount a revolt. End comment.

10. I said there were many rumors and reports with little substantiation floating about. Indeed some concerned the US and had contributed to a feeling of mutual suspicion that had in my opinion affected relations between our two countries. It was less content of action than the style in which they were effected that was so annoying, the latest example concerning the innuendoes about the US Navy. I reviewed that situation, stating I was convinced the Chilean Embassy had deliberately leaked this news in a fashion designed to reach the NY Times. The same route had often been traveled in the past by Latin Americans to Tad Szulc of the NYT.

11. Frei replied he had always been totally candid with me and that he wanted me to know that I was wrong. He launched into an uninterrupted 30 minute review of rels with the US in which (a) he reiterated his conviction that Chilean foreign policy starts with the absolute necessity for good rels with the US; (b) no President in Latin America had received more effective or more comprehensive support than he had from the US; (c) no President in Latin America had so consistently voiced public recognition of the US contribution or had avoided so assiduously any criticism of the US including an absolute silence on Vietnam or other embarrassing subjects; (d) no President to his knowledge had recognized and acted so promptly to rectify mistakes and errors committed by his govt in its rels with the US as he and he was certain I was most aware of his responsiveness and of the confidence he had thus demonstrated in me. Hence he felt it was only just that he explain his point of view.

12. As soon as I had spoken to Troncoso Wednesday night he had called Amb Santa Maria in Washington. I would have to consider him (Frei) a cretin to believe that anyone in the GOC or interested in the election of Tomic as Santa Maria was to engage in so suicidal an act. Publication of the NYT story about “Pentagon planning behind the back of the State Dept” could only help Allende. Santa Maria had understood that immediately and had taken an oath that he was not involved. Santa Maria had worked all through Wednesday night and Thursday to halt publication of the Szulc story; and he was delighted to be able to inform me that the NYT had (a) provided Santa Maria with a summary of the story it had planned to run election day; (b) agreed to delay its publication upon being persuaded by Frei that it could seal the defeat of democratic forces in Chile; (c) Szulc had stated and had written that the Dept was the source of the story and (d) Szulc had stated the Dept had made no effort to halt the story.

13. He wished me to understand that when Allende had visited him last week with his campaign managers, the first subject raised by the Marxist candidate was the “extraordinary influx of Americans” into Chile. Frei said one of his greatest preoccupations was that if Allende was defeated he would cry fraud and with victory would accuse the GOC of conspiring with the US to rob him of the election by military or other intervention. Hence Frei wished to be in a position to demonstrate the GOC had taken every possible action to prove its skirts were clean. It was a fact, he said that some of the US Navy visaed had arrived; it was a fact that there were some 2000 or 3000 more US citizens in Chile this year than in the last few at this season and there was also an equally great number of Argentines. It was the facts that lay behind the GOC request to US to provide the names of all Americans in country.

14. He confessed he did have some doubts about the US. He considered the action of the Embassy in this entire election year to have been “the most exemplary imaginable, the most intelligent conceivable” and he wished me to know that the entire govt and most informed Chileans had nothing to say about me and the Emb except to offer the most hearty round of applause. However he had read a great many books by American statesmen and he knew that the Dept often did not know what was being planned in the Pentagon. He hoped I would forgive him this suspicion and this candor. It was there and it was much stronger in many other Chileans. He recognized that Chile was only an insignificant country of some 9,000,000, that it was intellectually silly to believe the US would care that much, but after all the victory of Allende would affect all Latin America and it would touch US interests. It was not one of his greatest preoccupations but it meshed with the profound one of what would be the reaction to the election results by the Marxists. Hence he had now given the order

world-wide to suspend all granting of visas for a period of one week starting yesterday and that visas could only be approved individually by Ministry Foreign Affairs.

15. He said incidentally that the US would have the best prospects of good relations with Tomic of any of the candidates. Tomic was passionate about the need for such relations and while there might be some ups and downs in the first six months, a Tomic regime would settle down to uninterrupted mutual confidence with the US. With Alessandri, there would be such disappointment in the US when his govt began to squeeze US companies, when he sought to placate the Communists and when he failed generally to infuse dynamism or to maintain order, that there would be many difficulties.

16. In reply I accepted his position although I hoped he would pardon my unabated suspicions as to how the story was leaked. He was one thing; some of his collaborators were another. What bothered me was that the suspicions about the Navy were an extension of many other actions which had quite honestly led me to entertain doubts as to the veracity and motives of some in his govt. His dis-invitation to his lunch a fortnight ago had strengthened these doubts and I had lamented most the seeming loss of his confidence. I had repeatedly told the GOC that (a) I assumed full responsibility for the entry of all Americans; (b) the USG had no rpt no plans for any military intervention of any kind in Chile; (c) I had requested and the Dept had complied in the extraordinary process of detailing each visa already granted the Navy because of our awareness of the nervousness; (d) I knew of none of the visaed Navy personnel that had entered the country despite the contrary assertion by UnderSec Foreign Affairs Silva who had failed to provide me as promised with the names of any of the six he said had in fact arrived; (e) I was unaware of any great influx of Americans and I had the greatest doubts as to the facts but Chile had launched a tourist drive in the US this year and it was the first in three years there was snow for skiing here. Also I wished him to see our note of July 27th to his Foreign Ministry requesting permission for 24 US Navy air crews to make flights over Antarctica from Chile for scientific purposes; there was no secret about our actions and I resented the implications that the USG was engaged in any unusual action. He was aware of my rebuffing attempts by Gen. Viaux and even active military officers to draw members of the US Diplomatic Mission into discussions concerning Chilean military contingencies. I had given the most categorical assurances and the GOC had not accepted them. The implications were serious.

17. The President said he accepted them now without reservation. He was relieved. We continued to talk about the elections and about the probability of a strenuous MIR reaction to an Allende defeat with greater Socialist support than ever. We discussed ways of improving our liasion in this field. He explained away the lunch dis-invitation as due to a change in the size of the affair.

18. Recommendations: That in the event of a victory by Alessandri or Tomic, President Nixon send a cable to President Frei tomorrow congratulating him on the impressive example of democracy in action. No rpt no cable should be sent to any candidate whatever his margin since it would be a direct intervention in the constitutional process involving a congressional runoff. No rpt no cable should be sent in the event of an Allende victory until we all have time to reflect.

19. Suggestion to Dept: I would urge most strenuously that you communicate promptly to Szulc that we have sorted out most of the names and purposes of the 87 Navy request—24 concerned with our note of July 27 to the MFA requesting the flights as part of the National Science Foundation Antarctic Research Program, 49 as part of the Unitas Transit visit per Embtel 3473, and presumably the remaining 14 for routine Antarctic relief by sea from Punta Arenas. I so suggest in the hopes that even Szulc would have the honesty to include these facts and thus rectify the impression conveyed by his story and by the Department that we do not know what the Pentagon is up to. The fact is that the Embassy did know and the Chilean Govt was informed about most of it, since it had the aforementioned note and my oral communication about the Unitas band cum crew. It is [in]comprehensible to me why these routine matters require almost two weeks for clarification. It would be the rashest of imprudences to permit a malicious story based on nothing to do the kind of damage that it might wreak here.