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Memorandum From the Ambassador to Chile (Korry) to the 40 Committee

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Ambassador’s Response to Request for Analysis of Military Option in Present Chilean Situation

1. We believe it now clear that Chilean military will not repeat not move to prevent Allende’s accession, barring unlikely situation of national chaos and widespread violence. All info available to us indicates that Armed Forces’ chiefs are unprepared go beyond seeking minimal “guarantees” from Allende which in their view would protect existing rank structure and prevent politicizing of military. (We regard such guarantees as virtually worthless over the long haul.)

2. Our own military people have had fairly extensive contacts with their Chilean colleagues during last few days. They are unanimous in rejecting possibility of meaningful military intervention in political situation prior to October 24 Congressional election of President. There is apparently some talk among some officers of doing something after that date if Allende is elected. In our judgement such mutterings are not to be taken seriously.

3. You will have seen from our recent reporting that the Alessandri—to new elections—to Frei formula has acquired new life. We cannot yet be optimistic; we believe that the scheme might just possibly work if intense pressures on PDC build up (disintegrating economic situation, spreading fear aroused by premature Communist moves, etc.) and if Frei succeeds in what is beginning to look like an all-out effort.

4. Military in their current and customary state of flabby irresolution have no part to play in this scenario until the final act. Whatever the outcome of any discussions with Allende which may take place, we foresee no significant, sustained pressure from that quarter on Frei and PDC. We have to accept fact that this military establishment simply lacks cohesion and political purpose; its only real unifying instinct is to survive so as to enjoy minor privileges (cars, houses, pensions and the like) and dazzle parade-ground audiences. Fears in the Armed Forces of what a Marxist regime will mean for the institution—and they do exist—can all too easily be tranquilized by Allende appeals to these petty self-interests, accompanied by the hollow guarantees to which we have referred. In all fairness, we must add that military are also afflicted by nightmare of confrontation in the streets with “popular forces” and are unwilling or unable to consider how they might pre-empt or contain such forces. Unless backed by unambiguous constitutional and legal authority, they would shrink from prospect of having to shoot civilians and others provoking what they see as possible civil war. Armed forces are so disorganized and inexperienced in these matters as to make impossible the kind of quick bloodless military intervention (including prior roundup of leftist leaders) we are familiar with in other Latin American countries.

5. As stated, however, military would have a vital part to play on October 24–25 if scenario were to unfold favorably. Troops in the background prepared to maintain order in Santiago, and to ensure that the constitutional will of the Congress

prevailed, would be necessary. It is our judgement that Frei again is the key to this problem. The commanders can be expected to obey his orders, and we think it likely that the troops, despite some Marxist penetration, will obey theirs. It seems to us, then, that the success of such an enterprise in all its aspects must depend on the President's will and skills—personal qualities on which experience counsels we cannot pin more than modest hopes.

6. What we are saying in this "cold-blooded assessment" is that opportunities for further significant USG action with the Chilean military are nonexistent. They already know they have our blessing for any serious move against Allende, and we can manage to repeat the message if circumstances should so dictate. But this is as far as we can prudently or reasonably go. There is no group or individual within the Armed Forces around whom a coup effort with any real chance of success could be organized. Even Viaux is reportedly seeking to meet Allende. We repeat that our best intelligence makes it clear that nothing will move the Armed Forces on their own except near apocalyptic developments. For the time being it is therefore our intention to restrict our efforts in this field to normal contacts. More could be risky to us and harmful to the Frei effort.

7. Although the foregoing does not respond specifically to hypothetical questions you put to us, we believe that our analysis does adequately cover the realities in terms of 40 Committee deliberations. We also realize, however, that the shift to what can be called the political alternative will raise new questions about possible USG political action to support new-election scenario. These may be satisfied by making the following points: (a) There is considerable loose talk among rightists and certain Christian Democrats concerning the buying of key votes in Congress. At present this is nothing more than wild speculation. In any case, vote buying will be a waste of time and money unless PDC junta takes party decision favorable to scenario: i.e., to instruct parliamentarians vote for Alessandri (most unlikely) or to allow them free choice. Otherwise, Allende will have more than enough votes. Junta, which has more than 400 members, can neither be bought nor directly influenced by U.S. action. If we reach the point, we will of course be prepared recommend immediate exploitation any realistic opportunity for manipulative action in Congress. (b) In meantime, Ambassador is in close but discreet touch with key people around Frei who are transmitting to and from that central figure information, ideas, influence and implicit evidence of USG support. Ambassador is also using range of contacts and methods in quiet very contained effort to create propitious atmosphere for scenario. He will be reporting separately on these moves. Embassy and CAS are maintaining lowest possible profile and non-involvement beyond necessary intelligence collection activities.

8. Situation is still too fluid and uncertain to permit intelligent assessment of prospects for effective covert action under Allende. We will, however, be working on identifying possibilities and will report as soon as realistic recommendations can be made.