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Memorandum From the Chief of Naval Operations (Zumwalt) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)

Identificador Archival:	frus:frus1969-76v21/d91
Agencia Emisora:	CIA
Fecha del Documento:	1970-09-15
Colección / Serie:	FRUS 1969–1976, vol. XXI: Chile, 1969–1973

Nota de Archivo: *Washington. Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 777, Country Files, Latin America, Chile 1970. Secret; Sensitive. An attached covering memorandum from Robinson to Kissinger indicates that Moorer provided Packard with a copy. Zumwalt sent Moorer a draft of this memorandum on September 14, which noted that policymakers favored a "restrained, deliberate posture" on Chile. Moreover, it took issue with the CIA for the assessment that an enlarged Soviet presence would not threaten any U.S. vital strategic interest. (The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume X: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1969–1972, Historical Division Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1991, p. 159)*

Chile (U)

1. The final results of the recent election in Chile pose serious problems for the United States. If the forthcoming meeting of the Chilean Congress decides in favor of Salvador Allende, U.S. strategy and policy could be threatened throughout the Western Hemisphere. Accordingly, I desire to provide you with my views on this issue:

a. Quite apart from general concern over the penetration of a Marxist-Leninist regime into the South American continent, I explicitly disagree with any judgment that the U.S. has no vital strategic interest which would be threatened by the establishment of an enlarged Soviet presence in Chile.

b. I do agree that the caution which would characterize both sides of the Chilean-Soviet relation would make unlikely the establishment of Soviet military bases in the short run.

c. I believe that the odds are about even that this short run period will take two years. By the middle of 1972 we could face a situation in which:

(1) The Marxist-Leninist government of Chile had sufficiently overcome opposition elements, including the military, that a deal with the Soviet Union for an overt military presence became possible.

(2) The Soviet presence could by that time have proceeded to the extensive use of Chilean territory for the geographically ideal support of Soviet space and, more seriously, Fractional Orbit Bombardment programs (with all that the latter portends for increased first strike capability).

(3) The Soviets in Chile could by then risk the revelation of naval and air bases in Chile and in the offshore islands.

d. The acquisition of the Soviet Navy of bases along the 3,000 miles of coastline from which to project Soviet power into the South Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and into the South American continent, would result in a significant additional dimunition of U.S. power and a corresponding increase in Soviet power. Because it would come about slowly, this change would be less dramatic to the public than the Soviet attempt to emplace missiles in Cuba, but would probably be even more

profound because it would represent conventional power, more usable, in a conventional struggle and for military-political purposes.

e. Although I evaluate the chances of the foregoing happening in 1972 as about even, I judge that the chances would increase closer to unity by 1974.

f. The consequences of the foregoing are of such significance in world politics and in the hemisphere, and the extent to which U.S. forces would be required to reverse them later, so marked, that I believe they raise the threshold of risk that should be taken before the Chilean Congress votes for Allende.

2. I, therefore, recommend that the position of the U.S. Government be:

a. To view with great concern and urgency the need to find ways to prevent the election of Allende because of the strategic implications of a Soviet presence in Chile in the long term.

b. To initiate actions to get this done which have moderately high political risk.