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Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Chile (Korry) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson)

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1. I am extremely grateful for the confidence and support of President Nixon and the 40 Committee.

2. I am painfully aware of the delicacy of my situation and I trust that you and your colleagues are equally aware of the long odds involved.

3. President Frei's attitude is very clear to me: He is 100 per cent opposed to Allende but he will not repeat not move unless (a) he is convinced he has a certainty of winning the fight and (b) he has a moral base to justify his struggle.

4. To provide that moral base is largely our task in rapidly bringing to the attention of the world that the process here is almost exactly the same as that which led to the establishment of a Communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia in 1948. Frei is Benes and people such as Minister of Defense Ossa may be the future Masaryk, although not of the same intellectual quality.

5. It is highly unlikely I shall be able to see Frei. I cannot go to the Presidential palace without creating a storm; I cannot go to his home any more since it is subject to the same observation that my residence is. There are no U.S. visitors such as John Richardson in sight to provide an innocuous cover for another talk. Hence I delivered my message to Frei one hour after receipt of your message through Minister of Defense Ossa [less than 1 line not declassified].

6. I told Ossa that there was no point in further analysis of the situation. Of course, I added, I wanted to be kept informed, but I was not going to do anything aside from getting the truth to the world unless and until the President made up his mind. We were prepared to give appropriate support if Frei could decide his own course, but if he preferred to live interminably the Hamlet role, if he preferred to cite all the reasons he could not act, there was no justification for anyone else to be concerned about his fate or that of Chile. If he chose immobility, I would regard him personally, and I was not speaking for my government, I stressed, as a pathetic castrate unworthy of either sympathy or sustenance. I wanted to know precisely what he was willing to do. Frei could reflect but if he had not made up his mind sometime in the week after the big weekend holiday, I would take that indecision to mean that he had opted for a Communist Chile. In the interim I would be able to make tentative judgments by such public actions as the GOC might continue to take in support of Allende in the economic and other key sectors. Frei could not have it both ways, bemoaning his future and hastening it.

7. Your instructions re military in Paragraph 5 of your message will be applied by me in a manner best designed to obtain optimum political mileage and the necessary intelligence on military plans and attitudes on which policy decisions can be based. I see little hope that they can still be galvanized into action by anything we may or may not do. They are a union of

toy soldiers who need an order to move and that order can only come from Frei. Otherwise they will rationalize and reinforce their impotence. Ossa has been seeking for days to elicit a statement from them stating they support the constitutional process and will maintain law and order in defense of the constitution. They have so far refused on the grounds it could be misinterpreted as political interference. Also, they have insisted that the September 19 planned demonstration for Frei not include any banners or signs in favor of the president since the day was strictly a military one and could not be "despoiled" by political acts. My recommendation—and indeed my instructions unless specifically countermanded—to our military except in the case of our ubiquitous Army Attaché is to limit all social contacts and all communications with Chilean armed services aside from the most minimal technical activities of the MilGroup. Such disdain will probably have no effect of any great significance but we should show indirectly that we do not consider them of any import. Perhaps some of them will begin to reflect upon their moral cowardice and their lack of qualification as either officers or gentlemen. You must also bear very much in mind the message that I have persistently transmitted from here for three years—that the elimination of grant military aid, the low limits of MAP sales and the slashing of training funds (the most recent example contrary to approved CASP) could only lead to the elimination of meaningful U.S. influences on the military. The MilGroup has no repeat no influence. I am reviewing all possible means of utilizing our military for some effect and I will perhaps submit some concrete recommendations in the near future but we must keep in mind the need to protect President Nixon from any unnecessary vulnerability, particularly if our actions would most likely be ineffectual.

8. I will send a joint message with [less than 1 line not declassified] on what I shall be expecting from them.

9. Finally, we must keep the pressure on Frei and Frei principally. If he is not going to make the moral commitment in the form of action, no one should seek to make it for him. He told me and John Richardson what he wanted from the U.S.—propaganda abroad—and he has informed me through his lieutenants that he wants my advice. They in turn are transmitting my suggestions and views; they also have indicated they need assurances of being able to get out of Chile in extremis and of funds at a certain point in time. I would hope that key members of the U.S. business community would handle much of the funding problem when and if we get to that point. But we are not there yet.

10. Other reporting follows in State channels; where unsourced it is based on Ossa conversation.