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Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

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Nota de Archivo: *Summary: In this continuation of telegram 2714 (Document 9), Korry gave a detailed analysis of the three Chilean Presidential candidates—Radomiro Tomic, Jorge Alessandri, and Salvador Allende—and their platforms, and offered his insight into the ongoing Presidential campaign. Korry predicted that Alessandri would ultimately gain support at the expense of the other two candidates. Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 774, Country Files, Latin America, Chile, Vol. II. Secret; Limdis. Repeated to USCINSCO, Asunción, Bogotá, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Guatemala, La Paz, Lima, Mexico City, Montevideo, Panama, Quito, Rio de Janeiro, San Salvador, and Santo Domingo.*

2726. Subj: Chile: Election Perspectives #4 (Part II). Ref Santiago 2714.

1. Ever since Machiavelli argued the distinction that half of men's actions were ruled by chance and half by men themselves, most of us have consciously sought to change that balance. For politicians, the interplay between Machiavelli's fortuna and virtu—a crude anticipation of the Freudian trinity of id, ego and super-ego—is most evident at election-time.

2. It has been my belief, not at all shared unanimously, that any Christian Democrat could have easily won this election. All he needed as tactics, whatever his eventual program, were (A) the polemical dismissal of a 74 year old opponent as an absurd proposition (B) a firm hold on Frei's coat-tails (C) the pledge of still more rational reforms and (D) a conscious distinction between Revolution in Liberty, the Frei winning slogan and revolution. Given the unanimous finding of all 1970 polls that a majority of Chileans regard the accomplishments of the Frei administration as better than average, given the incontrovertible evidences of Frei's unique popularity today and given the traditional Chilean proclivity to bestow sympathy on their outgoing leaders, the President, although a lame duck, was, by luck and chance, the trump ace in the electoral game. This judgment is essential to any understanding of what is transpiring.

3. Tomic is increasingly viewed by all sectors of opinion as a poor third in the race. Indeed some of his downcast supporters have told us they are concerned for the future of party and of Chile because they fear he may not even draw 750,000 of the 3 million expected votes. The question that perplexes most analysts is why a candidate that was doubtlessly beginning to hit on all cylinders only two months ago (see #2 in this series) could so ruinously strip his gears. One possible lengthy explanation follows.

4. From the time I met Tomic three years ago until today he has clung unwaveringly to these assumptions:

A. Alessandri would never stick out the campaign.

B. The Frei regime was basically a failure, or at best a transition, because it was seeking to reform rather than overturn an inherently rotten system.

C. Efficiency, including an end to the 80-year disease of high inflation and the beginning of consistent dynamic growth, required mass participation and mass discipline which, in turn, could only come from the active cooperation of the potent Communists and, perhaps, a sector of Socialists.

D. He alone could bring about the three “miracles” that would transform Chile—the understanding of the US that a society somewhat like Yugoslavia’s is in the US interest, the sympathy of the Soviet Union because such a society would end US hegemony and capitalism, and finally the cooperation of the Communists.

5. Although Tomic had always maintained too that he would not be a candidate unless he was assured the support of the “popular parties,” the stinging rebuffs of the Communists and Socialists persuaded him only to alter his condition to that of the “popular forces.” He reasoned that this semantical modification was of ephemeral insignificance since he would surely be elected—without alienating the popular “forces”—and since he would enact a program that would be bound to forge a working arrangement with the Communists. Moreover he calculated that even if Alessandri remained in the race, his assumptions would compel the Marxist parties to vote for him in a congressional runoff with the ex-President.

6. The fact that the US Embassy did not rpt not at any time demonstrate any hostility or concern to Tomic led him to conclude that his first “miracle” had been achieved. The neutrality of the Soviet Embassy, the cultural accords signed by the Frei govt with Moscow and the manifest Soviet pleasure with Foreign Minister Valdes’ “opening to Cuba” persuaded Tomic that the second miracle had been fulfilled and that the third was only a matter of time. Reports from well-placed PDCers in the GOC and in the provinces that the Communists were listlessly going through the motions of an Allende campaign convinced Tomic, who was exultantly pulling grass-roots crowds, that he had been omniscient.

7. For his part Frei threw the enormous resources of the govt into the Tomic campaign. Funds were made available; inflation was braked by incredible effort to its present level of “only” 23.7 percent; inaugurations were timed to spotlight the PDC’s accomplishments; a public love feast between Frei and Tomic was held after the President’s final State of the Union message which, incidentally, came close to endorsing Tomic; foreign policy actions punctuated the harmony. The PDC was unified despite the profound divisions between its right (Frei) and left (Tomic) wings and the 30 percent that had voted for the party in 1969’s congressional elections was back in the fold.

8. Euphoria blinded Tomic. He ignored his vulnerability as a candidate who looks like a banker, talks like an archbishop and preaches “revolution.” He dismissed the fundamental antipathy of a great many Chileans to the PDC, to the same arrogance that underlies much of Tomic’s performance. He misunderstood the strength of Allende, the commitment to Allende of the Communists, the attraction of the bread-and-butter promises of the Popular Front and thus, miscalculated disastrously the calculus of Chilean variables.

9. If Allende is strong, there is a far stronger, much more primitive fear of violent disruption of life that translates into anti-Communism and preference for progressive change. What distinguishes Chile in Latin America is its very high degree of civility. It is civility that makes Frei so popular, that provides Chile such magnified international leverage and that makes “violence” such a litmus issue. Social engineers such as Tomic and a great many economists and political scientists with one preferred model, cannot quantify such intangibles as civility and therefore rarely perceive the real world in which they live.

10. Tomic and the Marxist parties make much of the 35 deaths that have occurred from police and army confrontations with strikers or demonstrators in the almost six years of Frei administration. By any hemispheric measure, that total is low. Yet the Marxists seek to exploit it as rightist repression and Tomic blames the system. Both understand the average Chilean’s outrage to any violence. At the same time they unconsciously defy the civility that provokes such outrage by ignoring the obverse side of civility—a strong desire to avoid convulsion. They also forget when they attack carabineros that almost all Chileans desire more not less police for personal protection.

11. Violence cum anti-Communism put the already stalled Tomic drive (see #3 in this series) into reverse. Tomic chose to equivocate over violence and to continue his wooing of the left. Alessandri who had made every mistake in the book suddenly was handed a second chance.

12. The campaign requisites that had imposed mutual tolerance on Frei and Tomic no longer held sway. Frei was not about to accept culpability for student deaths; he was not at all disposed to accept a theory of institutionalized violence that would have made a mockery of his six years in office. On the contrary he reckoned that unless he moved to the offensive against the Marxists, not only he but Tomic and the PDC would suffer grievously. To admit guilt would be to endorse Allende.

13. Tomic has thus far held to his assumptions. The GOC and PDC have sought to divide the Popular Front by various polemics. But there has been no attack yet by Tomic on Allende or on the real nature of Communist plans. Tomic has thus converted the center terrain he held as a PDC candidate into a waffle iron. And as this notion has spread, a steady drift towards polarization between Alessandri and Allende has also occurred.

14. Alessandri has exploited his new life by defending law and order, by dismissing Tomic as a serious contender (instead of responding to his every charge), by hammering on his above-parties position, by comparing prices in his regime with today, by keeping open all options except “convulsion” and by being himself—a crotchety independent patriarch. His supporters have for six weeks mounted a tremendous anti-Communism media campaign. No rpt no candidate is mentioned but Allende and Tomic each have attacked the campaign as one of “terror”—the Communist term—and have blamed the supporters of Alessandri. One of Tomic’s brain-trusts is promoting a congressional investigation. The Nacionales have quickly reposted by saying they regard the campaign as one of “truth” and de facto assume responsibility. Moreover they are recalling that it was the PDC who benefitted from such a campaign in 1964 and they are also ventilating sub rosa threats of looking into Tomic’s financing.

15. With Frei mildly echoing the anti-Communist theme, the Marxists are accusing him of aligning himself to Alessandri and to North Americans. While there have been a few mentions of the Embassy and while the CIA receives a modest amount of publicity in leftist-spheres, a more recent and subtle line is being floated by the best of Allende’s stable. In brief, it says US Embassy reps have for some time stated their lack of confidence in Alessandri’s capacity to govern in tranquillity; these same reps have told the PDC that Tomic cannot win without separating himself from the leftist forces; since the US has no faith in either Alessandri or Tomic and feels Allende is going to win, it is obvious that the US is planning a military coup. Since a coup is the least likely of all eventualities (although genuinely feared by the PCCh) this propagation by the Allende camp of our electoral neutrality is, in the circumstances, the best we can hope from a candidate and a group that has proclaimed US imperialism as the enemy in Latin America.

16. Allende’s declaration that he will join with Fidel Castro in a revolutionary hemispheric effort and that he will, by legal means, bring to Chile the same kind of structure as Cuba’s, is an offering to Alessandri’s altar. Again, Tomic prefers not to hear or deal with it and so his political asexuality is reinforced for many.

17. However since Frei is not only the first Christian Democratic President of this hemisphere and founder of the PDC but also the victor over Allende and the unshakeable enemy of Marxism-Leninism, he is increasingly being targetted by the left. He is also being blamed sotto voce by the Tomic camp within the PDC for the unpromising situation of their candidate. The Marxists want to use Frei to split the PDC and some PDCers want him to be the scapegoat. My own view is that Frei wants Allende to finish third; that he wants the PDC to do well and that he has sought in his way to help; that he has decided that Tomic’s pigheadedness has put him on the margin of an increasing polarization and that in such circumstances, Allende must be stopped.

18. The net effect is that whereas #2 in this series was Tomic's, #3 Allende's, the past month has been Alessandri's who has gained from both the polarization and Tomic's retrogression. The defection of another Radical Deputy (Samuel Fuentes) to Alessandri is probably the harbinger of more and bigger such shifts from Allende; it is noteworthy that the respected Radical Senator Juliet this week undercut Allende bread and butter promises by stating that obviously no govt could fund them. Another straw is that Tomic is running out of money, that demands for payment on large advances are now being heard and that he has less radio time for the moment than either of the other two. Another is that in two nearby agricultural communities, a very clear shift from Tomic to Allende among campesinos has just occurred, the explanation being that they do not wish to waste their vote on a loser. Another is the field trip report of an Emb officer which confirms a very marked upward movement in the Alessandri column in Concepcion Province; and perhaps most interesting of all, has been the enormous turnout for Alessandri this past week in the Anaconda mine area (both at Chuqui and at nearby Calama); a Chilean newspaper friend says Alessandri will poll very well there.

19. In sum, Alessandri is perhaps at the 38–39 mark now, Allende at the 33 and Tomic at the 25. If Alessandrista over-confidence does not reappear, if Tomic does not change tactics and if no chance event upsets the present pattern, there is a probability that Alessandri will get the sizeable vote he needs to assume office without undue difficulty and that, as the wiseacres here say, Tomic will be displaced as third by Senor Nulo Blanco.

20. One final comment on fortuna and virtu or id and ego. In Allende's case it is hardly advantageous to fall into a defensive posture against the "terror campaign;" the Communists understand the trap and are seeking, as the effective Popular Front radio ads do, to concentrate on bread and butter themes. But Allende is more and more adopting a whining and petulant tone that is not doing him any good. In Tomic's case, he has always articulated his fundamental differences with Frei in intellectual terms. But most informed Chileans believe he is suffering from the one-two syndrome; he has always been second to Frei and it galls him. It is this visceral element that has contributed so much to his programmatic fixations and to his electoral situation. Allende and Tomic, by chance, are men.