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Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

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Nota de Archivo: *Summary: This telegram reported on a meeting in which Letelier urged Davis to arrange a high-level meeting between U.S. officials and Allende during Allende's scheduled visit to New York in December. Describing Allende's trip as a "crossroads," Letelier noted that a meeting between the Chilean President and top U.S. policymakers was imperative. Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 7 CHILE. Secret; Immediate; Exdis.*

5291. Subject: Allende Trip. Ref: Santiago 5273.

1. Summary: Ambassador Letelier made strong appeal to me for an Allende invitation to Washington or a call on him in New York by the Secretary or Dr. Kissinger. Letelier described Allende trip as a crossroads—a critical opportunity which USG should take to preserve its rels with Chile from serious damage. End summary.

2. Ambassador Letelier spent almost three hours at lunch today making appeal that "historic opportunity" of Allende trip not be lost. He said he talked with FonMin Almeyda, but had not yet had opportunity to consult Pres Allende (who has been in Valparaiso during past day or two). He alleged he was acting on his own, trying to fulfill his responsibility as Amb to our country and preserve our relations from serious damage.

3. Letelier began by saying Allende's trip had both internal and external significance. Internally it would show once and for all that this regime has institutional stability—including military support and that the Chilean people must face up to the reality of four more years of their present govt. Pres Allende will leave the country and return and nothing will have happened. This fact alone will have immense political importance.

4. Turning to external side, Letelier painted picture of great Allende success in Mexico, UN speech which will be interpreted in David and Goliath terms vis-à-vis USG, open USG snub, warmly successful visit to USSR accompanied by significant announcement of credits, visit to Cuba and Fidel Castro, and then home. Impression given will be a turning to the East, and a moving away from Chile's present effort to maintain a balanced policy.

5. Letelier went on to describe Allende trip as a crossroads—"the moment of truth". After it, things will not be the same. Either it will be an opportunity to improve our relationship, or it will make things much worse. We should be under no illusion that we are not at a turning point, Letelier said. He stopped short of describing the negative consequences in truly apocalyptic terms, and reiterated several times during our conversation that he did not mean that the Chilean Govt would deliberately turn to a policy of sharpening its longest knives. Rather, he said, the dynamic of things and the balance of forces within the Chilean Govt would inevitably make things "much harder." In our conversation Letelier reverted again and again to the "historic moment" theme and the crucial importance of the Allende trip and our response to it.

6. During the foregoing (considerably condensed) remarks, I said very little. I did observe at one point that it looked as if the essential character of President Allende's trip was pretty well established by now. Letelier took issue with me with

considerable heat, saying that both the trip's political impact and the President's speech in New York would be debated within the GOC in the days ahead. At another point I expressed some mystification that the Chilean Govt had handled matters the way it had if its intention was to seek a dialogue with us. Letelier picked me up sharply, and asked exactly what I had in mind. I said I did not know Washington's views, but I personally questioned whether the language of Chile's recent note to us or the spate of press stories seeming to pressure US publicly were the ideal way to approach a dialogue. I mentioned my conversation with Almeyda (Santiago 5046) and said my impression was that the Chilean Govt meant what it said when it announced President Allende's trip to the United Nations as a visit focussed on that world forum. Letelier said we should have taken the initiative. He claimed that there were practically no precedents for a chief of government or chief of state of a country with which we maintain normal relations visiting New York without an invitation to Washington or a meeting with U.S. representatives at an extremely high level. I said that was not my impression, recalling one or two examples. Letelier retorted by saying he did not think I could name more than about two. (Action request: I would appreciate additional background by telegram on precedents for use with Letelier and others within the GOC.)

7. Letelier then talked in somewhat fuzzy terms about an Allende meeting with USG representatives. While an invitation to Washington to meet with President Nixon was obviously what he would like to see, he did say that a visit to New York by Secretary Rogers or a "White House representative" (i.e. Dr. Kissinger) would, he thought, be regarded positively. He went on: "I believe that any possible idea of having Assistant Secretary Meyer call on our President would not be so regarded, and it would be preferable not to propose it." He added that he had the highest regard for Mr. Meyer, and the concern was frankly one of level. I made no comment to any of this.

8. Letelier said that the impression the United States was making in quite a few Chilean Govt circles was one of indifference, perhaps deliberate delay, and perhaps even a desire not to work out our differences. I asked him where we had dragged our feet. He said the technical negotiations on debt renegotiation with the EXIM Bank and others had given something of that impression. I said that, speaking of impressions, I had the feeling that the Chilean Govt sometimes gave an impression of concentrating more on formulas of contact than on substantive positions which the Chilean Govt would have to change if we were to come to a mutual accommodation. Letelier acknowledged my point, and said he thought the Chilean Govt was prepared to make substantive proposals if the opportunity of the Allende trip were not missed. He hinted that military entry into the GOC could affect Chilean positions for the better. I asked if Letelier could give me any indication of what he had in mind in terms of substance, observing that the GOC seemed to be boxing itself in. Letelier mentioned the 1914 arbitration treaty, and asked what we thought of it. I said our lawyers in Washington saw a number of problems—including the rather lengthy mediation procedure, the reservation of questions affecting sovereignty and the lack of a clear prompt mechanism for reaching a decisive conclusion. Letelier answered that there were a lot of ways to skin a cat, and with our orderly Anglo-Saxon minds we should be able to find a way to work forward systematically to agreement. The important thing, he said, was that the 1914 treaty provided an "out" for the Chilean Govt in terms of being a treaty in force. We had to realize, he said, that a direct assault on the Chilean constitution would not get either of us anywhere. Letelier added that he was not speaking for FonMin Almeyda or the Chilean Govt in connection with the 1914 treaty.

9. I told Letelier I had requested an appointment with FonMin Almeyda and would deliver our answer to Chile's note of October 18, 1972. I said it would respond favorably to the Chilean desire for a bilateral discussion. Letelier asked whether it would address the Allende visit. I said that Chile's October 18 proposal was quite explicit in terms of the level of delegation Chile desired. Letelier said that Chile's note was prepared before the Allende trip was settled on (which I do not believe was the case). He did not indicate any opposition to talks, but made it very clear that he in no way wished to be deflected from the overriding importance he placed on the Allende trip and our response to it.

10. Letelier said that he had given Assistant Secretary Meyer some indication of his hope that our response to the Allende trip would be positive. He still hopes that I may be able to give him some encouraging word before he leaves Chile for Washington at the end of this week.

11. Comment: The present Chilean effort has overtones of stage-setting for a repetition of the myth of Fidel Castro's 1959 visit to Washington. We are already aware of the themes Letelier put forward to me today—including the concept of "the last chance" before Chile turns East. There is some truth in Letelier's allegation that the trip will be seen as a shift to the socialist camp. He also is probably right when he says it will make things harder. It is sad that the Chilean Govt has structured it that way if not with care at least with weeks of tinkling cymbals—and is now turning to us with heat and pressure to change the impression it so deliberately created.

12. While I do not expect short-term substantive results from a call by the Secretary on President Allende in New York, I believe it might be worth considering if the Secretary's schedule allows. What it might do is avoid atmospherics which Letelier forecasts with some accuracy without implications of a Presidential meeting.