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Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Chile

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Nota de Archivo: *Summary: During the daily news briefing on September 20—which took place between Kissinger's telephone conversations with Church and Mankiewicz—the Department of State spokesman, John F. King, received numerous questions about the situation in Chile; King struggled, in particular, to answer concerns raised regarding the welfare and whereabouts of U.S. citizens detained in Santiago. Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, [no film number]. Limited Official Use; Priority. Repeated priority to all American Republic diplomatic posts, USUN, and USCINCSO. Drafted and approved by Bell in ARA/PAF; cleared by Karkashian in ARA/BC.*

187854. Subject: Transcript of State Dept. News Briefing, Thursday, September 20.

The following are the pertinent remarks concerning Chile made by the State Department spokesman at today's noon briefing for your information and possible use in answering questions:

Q: John, on Chile, how many Americans are being held by the Chile Government and what is the U.S. doing about getting them out?

A: We have, from various sources, information about the Americans and their condition at Chile. At the moment, it seems that perhaps as many as six have been detained by the Junta. I have some of their names but, in other cases, next of kin have not been notified, so we would withhold that for the time being.

But, in any event, to answer the second part of your question, we've instructed the Embassy to continue its efforts to communicate with all American citizens who we would have reason to believe have been detained or otherwise deflected from their original purposes.

We will do the usual—that is to say, ascertain their welfare—seek to insure their human needs, if any—and, obviously be in contact with Chilean authorities to insure that they receive fair and equitable treatment.

Q: Why are they being held, John?

A: We don't know yet. As I say, we don't have all the facts.

Q: Are any of the six American officials—of any agency?

A: No, they're not officials. There are a couple of Maryknoll missionary priests: Joseph Dougherty, and Francis Flynn.

Q: Has there been any contact between the Embassy and these detainees to this point?

A: I'm pretty sure with some of them, but I just can't catalog it for you. Let me give you the other names I have: Adam Schesch, and his wife Patricia.

Q: Who are they, do you know?

A: American citizens. That's really the only way to characterize them now. And the last two names are: Carol Nesso—and—David Cusack. I'm sorry. That's all the information.

Q: Do you have occupations for the two last ones, John?

A: No.

Q: John, you don't have any information that Adam Schesch and David Cusack are American professors who were under contract to an American agency working in—

A: They could well be. I did see reference in at least one story this morning that the Schesch's were connected with an American university. But I can't confirm that; I don't know it yet.

We may well have the information. It just hasn't come in.

Q: American professors under contract to the United States Government, working in Chile?

A: It could well be. I just don't know.

Q: Do your previous sources say anything about the sort of treatment that these and other people are receiving?

A: Well, I guess I'm left in the unsatisfactory position of just saying that we don't have any firm information which would substantiate these charges which we've seen in several reports, but—

Q: What charges?

A: About repressive measures used against people who have been detained in Chile. I can assure you that the Embassy will do everything it can to perform the usual functions on behalf of American citizens who may be in need of assistance.

Q: We have not been given access to them though. We have not been denied that privilege?

A: This came up in a different form earlier. I just don't know. I can't speak to all of them. We know they're there, and we've been in touch either with them or with the appropriate authorities.

Q: John, Mrs. Allende, in an interview in the "Times" today, suggested that the U.S. Government might have helped foment the coup by paying off the striking transportation workers. Do you have any comment on that?

A: I'm not sure exactly what Mrs. Allende said, but let me repeat that the United States Government—and I speak for all elements of the Government—were not involved in the Chilean coup. We've said this repeatedly; I will say it again in answer to that.

Q: You recognize my question is different from that, do you?

A: Yes.

Q: Will you check into that? I mean it's getting a lot of publicity.

A: I realize that.

Q: Will you look into that?

A: I will stand on what I just said: We were not involved—and I repeat that.

Q: Then you're not denying you might have paid off the transportation workers.

A: Well, we were not involved in any way in that coup.

Q: John, are these people who are being detained—the Americans—charged, or about to be charged, with anything?

A: We don't know yet. We just don't know.

Q: John, in your opinion, would the payment—if you made any to the transport workers in Chile—constitute what Dr. Kissinger would have construed as an "interference in the internal affairs of another country"? He made a great issue of this at the confirmation hearings about internal affairs.

A: Look, I have great trouble accepting this premise that "if we did this" and that "if we did that." I said—and I repeat—we were not involved in any way in the overthrow of the Allende government.

Q: No. I realize, of course, that's a theoretical question.

A: Yes.

Q: Not directly or indirectly involved—is that what you're saying?

A: I said "in any way."

Q: John, I realize that your remarks are directed about the coup, but it still does not get down to the question about whether there was money given to the transportation strikers. Could you address yourself specifically to that question and not to the coup itself?

A: I see; yes.

Let me look into that. (Note: See end of cable.)

Q: Including the possibility that there may have been humanitarian assistance?

A: Well, we're including all possibilities. That's why I want to be as careful as possible about this matter.

Q: John, do you know if these Americans are being held in the sports stadium, or where?

A: I don't have their locale at hand. I can try to find that out for you. I assume they're in one of the two sports stadiums, which apparently are being used for detention purposes.

Q: John I'm a little bit surprised at you. You had no answer to the question whether there was any contact between the Embassy and the detained people.

A: Yes. I assume there has been, but I don't know whether they've seen them all. As I said, the information that they are detained has come to us from various sources; and I just can't be categoric about it. But, in any event, we will make every appropriate effort to do what is needed to assist these people.

Q: John, could I turn that question around? Has the Chilean Government offered any obstacles to American requests to see the six?

A: That's hard to say. It's a pretty confused situation. You know how you can run into anomalous situations. When I tell you that, I don't want you to think that we're having trouble.

The one case I do know about, where we were informed that the American had a problem, that the Embassy moved immediately, was in contact with the authorities—the person was released within hours, and everything seems to be all right.

Q: John, it's correct though that you have made representations to the new government on behalf of the six?

A: Well, no. We always like to be sure of our facts first. And before we get to that stage, you want to know exactly what they're charged with or why they're being held, and that sort of thing.

Q: Well, we have gone that far. We have asked the Chileans for the facts surrounding the individuals?

A: Yes. You can assume that we're doing that. Yes.

Q: John, how many of the Americans who were held, who were detained, have now been released?

A: I know of a couple of cases. I can't be more specific than that. And the material we pulled together here just doesn't address itself to that question. But you know that the swimmers were having a problem there. They arrived in Miami this morning.

Q: How many?

A: Half a dozen or so.

Q: Can you apply that statement of the "no American involvement in the coup in any way" to the six?

A: To the six?

Q: To the six who were being detained?

Q: In Santiago?

A: Yes. As far as I know, these were private citizens. I'm speaking about government involvement—the allegations of government involvement.

I just can't be blanket and categoric about a matter involving individuals.

Q: But you did say, John, that a couple of Americans were released; is this true?

A: Yes. To my knowledge, yes.

Q: Then you're not ruling out the possibility that some private business interests may have been involved in the coup? You're only denying from a government standpoint.

A: No change; surely. I wouldn't presume to speak for anybody else.

Q: I ask: Do you rule out the possibility?

A: I wouldn't even accept the question. I speak only for the Department.

Q: But you said you spoke for all agencies of the U.S. Government.

A: For the United States Government, lest there be any misapprehensions here.

Q: Could I just finish up one question on Chile, please?

I'm just puzzled by your wording. You said "as many as six have been detained." Does that mean that you know there are no more and that some of these may be released by now?

A: I guess we calculate that at the time of the coup there may have been as many as several thousand Americans in Santiago or environs; and, you know, who knows what problems some of these people have?

Well, for instance—for days you couldn't get an airplane out of Chile. And I just can't be categoric about all the Americans.

Q: But you know there are no more than these six in detention.

A: We have no information that there are more; I have no information that there are more.

What I'm saying is that we're dealing with a half dozen to a dozen people here, as I understand it. Only six Americans that we know of were being detained as of today.

Q: John, just for the purpose of this story, when was the last time the Department was absolutely sure that these six people were still being detained?

A: This morning.

End transcript.

Later in the afternoon the following statement was released by the spokesman to the press:

We have seen the statement attributed to Mrs. Allende as well as other stories suggesting that the United States might have financed the truckers' strike which preceded the coup in Chile. Such suggestions are absurd. The United States played no part, financial or otherwise, in that strike or in the other stoppages and protests mounted by the opposition to Allende.

Decontrol December 20, 1973.