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Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

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Nota de Archivo: *Summary: Korry reported on what to expect in the upcoming election. Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 14 CHILE. Secret; Limdis. Repeated to USCINCSO, Buenos Aires, Lima, Asunción, Bogotá, Brasilia, Caracas, Guatemala, La Paz, Mexico City, Montevideo, Panama, Quito, Rio de Janeiro, San Salvador, and Santo Domingo. Reference telegram 3205 from Santiago, August 18, is ibid.*

3413. Subj: Chile: Election Perspective 6. Ref: Santiago 3205.

1. Summary. The interminable Chilean Presidential campaign ends Thursday noon and after a breather of 20 hours, some 3,100,000 voters are expected to cast ballots Friday. The three candidates are like three castrates acting the part of Casanova, each lustily acclaiming his imminent triumph, each certain only of his lack of an absolute majority. The real issue then is whether any of the three will gain a large enough first majority to convert the congressional runoff of Oct 24th into a formality. Both Alessandri and Allende are genuinely confident of attaining 40 pct; Tomic cannot hope now for more than a tight outcome in which he would sneak into second place and thus have the best chance of being elected President; visiting US professors and even some US businessmen foresee Tomic emerging as President by this process. The most respected poll predicts a thumping Alessandri triumph; another projects Allende as the winner. The Embassy foresees Alessandri edging Allende with the possibility of a last minute swing of anti-Communist and anti-politiqueria sentiment widening the gap. A close race would create a tense climate in the 50 days before the runoff. (End summary)

2. Other South American countries have carnivals; Chile has elections. The Latin nexus between the two is finally self-evident these last few days before the Sept 4th vote. The sexennial exercise in democracy here is now infused with the Carioca’s annual indulgence in passion, release and mystery. After ten official months of stultifying campaign that made Chile “the kingdom of anyplace inhabited by anyone”, Santiago is alive with the movement, with the gay nervousness and the drama that this is a truly fateful choice between democracy and Communism.

3. Shortly after midnight this past Sunday (and for 24 more hours) autos began beeping through the capital’s streets, guns were exuberantly discharged and distraught ward heelers scurried through penultimate patterns as the Alessandri forces mounted what later that morning was to be the largest political demonstration in this campaign. At least one quarter of a million Santiaguinos packed the broad park-and-avenue from the downtown rail station for one-mile to the Fine Arts Museum. The multitude had a festive air for all its heterogenity of well-heeled rubbing shoulders with the great unwashed. It had the confidence of a winning side and the purposefulness of an army that knows public panoply persuades the doubters.

4. The strategists behind the 74 year old ex-President are going flat out to create a mood of polarization that would mean death to the hopes of the standard bearer of the Christian Democratic Party, Radomiro Tomic, and that would signify the prospects of a clear margin of victory over the Marxist-Leninist forces led for a fourth and final time by Salvador Allende,

the Socialist doctor. Alessandri's brain-trust is confident that it has at least 38 pct of the expected 3,100,000 voters (of 3,500,000 inscribed) in its pocket. They are aiming at 45 pct so as to obviate any congressional choice in the runoff scheduled for Oct 24th. All signs indicate they have an even-money chance of breaking beyond 40 pct into the clear ground of a definitive margin.

5. Allende is also confident. Indeed in his unexpected call on President Frei in the middle of last week, he and his commando gave off a bravura of rehearsal for the grand and formal entry on inauguration day. While Frei was much impressed by the aura of victory, he was also moved to remark to a mutual friend that this band of power-seekers had all the attributes of an Indian scalping party; it was, he said, as if the Araucanos (Chile's Indians) had finally triumphed over the Conquistadores.

6. The President is also much affected by the results, still unpublished, of the Hamuy poll. Hamuy, as I have noted previously is a controversial figure who has been paid $150,000 for his election year samplings by the PDC and by govt agencies. Although an adherent of Allende in 1964 and a bohemian of anarchist belief, he is universally respected in PDC circles as an honest, professional seer. His national figures, I have been repeatedly informed, show Allende to be a winner. (His long-delayed poll will probably be published to show Allende and Tomic neck and neck.) Moreover, we all know that the Allende forces are genuinely confident, that they do believe they have at least 40 pct of the vote and that their most serious concern is that somehow this triumph at the polls will be plucked by military intervention. They cannot entertain a calculus that does not begin with the known 39 pct that Allende attracted in his 1964 race against Frei and with the further known fact that the nominal sum of Popular Unity components total 46 pct. Also on their side they have the unfulfilled aspirations of an awakened mass of poor that equals 60 pct of the electorate, an inflationary rate of 30 pct again this year, considerable unemployment and under-employment, the sympathy of possibly a majority of those who influence opinion through the media and the most complete freedom of action in every sector.

7. Yet the poll we most respect despite its patronage by Alessandri forces is that of CESEC (Centro de Estudios Socio-Economicos). Most of the front-page of Chile's lending publication, El Mercurio, which is also the great thunderer of the Alessandri campaign, was devoted Sunday to CESEC's final national figures:

CESEC's sample was taken August 8 to 16; it includes the usual caution of possible three percent error. We have checked the methodology of CESEC and are satisfied that it, and more importantly, the accompanying honesty, appear to be beyond doubt.

8. Nonetheless there are doubts. Frei has them; I have them. For example this past Saturday after being apprised privately of CESEC's figures, Frei said he could not accept CESEC's results for the north that gave Alessandri 47 pct. The President argued that he had worked as editor in and Senator from the north and knew it particularly well. He placed Alessandri third there. Therefore, he concluded, if one area was so misrepresented, he could not accept anything else from CESEC. The Embassy sent one officer to the north last month and his unscientific but competent impressions differ from both Frei's and CESEC's; our man in the north found considerable Alessandri strength and he projected the ex-President as a respectable second behind Allende with Tomic a poor third.

9. The Embassy, incidentally, has its own guesstimates based on a few personal visitations, analysis of past elections and general appreciations. After allowing for a deliberate arithmetical bias in favor of Allende wherever there was doubt and equally bearish weighting against the Alessandri fever, it gives Alessandri at least 38 pct, Allende 34 pct and Tomic 28 pct. If these projections materialize, Chile will probably have a very difficult 50-days that would be the antithesis of the cooling-off that the writers of the constitution had in mind.

10. It is significant that aside from the most loyal of the PDC and a few visiting American professors, there are few who think Tomic still has a good shot at the ring. His supporters are parading throughout the city in noisy bands and he too will

have his final mass demonstration Wednesday to end the interminable campaign. (All electoral activity is banned for 20 hours preceding the Friday holiday vote and Allende will end his efforts with a Tuesday rally.) Frei still thinks that the race may end with only seven or so percentage points separating first and third. The President is persuaded Tomic has recovered somewhat in the last fortnight, particularly with women, and that Tomic has benefitted from finally concentrating on establishing a link with Frei and his govt's achievements. He also thinks, as do most high level PDCers that what the Marxists and the PDC have labelled "the campaign of terror" (the massive anti-Communist propaganda drive launched three months ago by Alessandri's supporters) has aided Tomic considerably; some say is the one element that keeps Tomic in contention.

11. Indeed, there are scattered indications that women, particularly middle class Santiago females, have been shifting lately towards Tomic because of the "terror campaign". They reason that Allende means Communism and that Alessandri signifies violence; hence they conclude that the best chance for tranquility, their over-riding concern, is Tomic. How many calculate in this fashion is difficult to assess. What is certain is that the PDC has been focusing on this issue and the female vote. The ladies will surely determine the winner; for the first time they may outnumber (their abstention rate is generally considerably lower) the men who have 200,000 more registered.

12. A few hopeful straws in the wind prompted a group of Tomicistas last week to announce their acceptance of an equally public challenge by the head of Alessandri's campaign (Ernesto Pinto) that he was prepared to wager 200,000 escudos ($10,000) Tomic would finish third. Campaign headquarters have a busy sideline making election "book" for any who wish to risk a flyer on their favorite. Uncertainty has also been scented in the land of milk and money; Swiss bankers have silently been arriving to be of service in the event of an Alessandri defeat. Liquifying assets has also placed the modest but flourishing saving and loan associations in a difficult squeeze; this sector of Chilean activity has experienced withdrawals equal to six or seven million dollars in the past few months. From this one indicator it would not be rash to reckon that perhaps 30 to 50 times that amount would be available for prompt handling by the friendly Swiss bankers.

13. The electorate may well, as befits a democracy, sweep away the uncertainties with a clear verdict Friday. Frei, a man with no penchant for hard decisions and with a proclivity for eternal second thoughts, would prefer, as a French general in Indochina once said, to wait for the solution from above instead of looking for it within oneself. He tells visitors that the military will intervene if Allende is President; this deliberately loose talk is probably aimed at persuading voters since there is no reason yet to believe that the military has any such intention nor any such plan, and it is most improbable that Frei would suggest to the armed forces that they upset a democratic result.

14. Nonetheless there is a certain rustling of sabers. Gen Viaux, retired for his rebellion of last October, is being willingly manipulated by professional plotters, most notably Jorge Prat; his intemperate activity is probably adding to the divisiveness of an already disunited Army. It would not be surprising if the govt which has infiltrated Viaux' circle would employ preventive measures to put Viaux on ice if the election results suggested such prudence.

15. Without any evidence in support, I believe there are more meaningful talks underway between serious Alessandristas and service leaders. It would not come as a total surprise if the leaders of the Navy, Air Force and Carabineros were to exert pressures on their Army counter-parts to take either symbolic action, in the event of an Alessandri first majority, or to consider other interventionary measures in the event of an Allende triumph.

16. Other preparations in the political sphere have been made to prepare for these two contingencies. There is increasing evidence of a successful Alessandri operation with the orthodox Radicals. This past week, Sam "fifty" (for thousand) Fuentes, a Radical Deputy who has turned a pretty penny by flip-flopping between Allende and Alessandri, announced definitely for the ex-President. Radical Senator Alberto Baltra, the disappointed aspirant for the Popular Unity candidacy, sought me out at a social function Friday to display unprecedented friendship and to confide that in his province (Cautin),

Alessandri would have an absolute majority, a strange confidence for one of the “leaders” of the Allende campaign. If the ex-President were to finish first ahead of Allende, Alessandri counts on all but one (Miranda) of the seven Radical Senators’ secret ballots and most of the 20 Radical Deputies in the congressional runoff. His advisors are also convinced that at least 20 of the 75 Christian Democrats in the congress would without any doubt vote for Alessandri over Allende while 18 would opt for the Marxist. Hence the nominal lineup of 44 congressional votes for Alessandri and 81 for Allende is misleading; a truer reading would be 80 for Alessandri and 83 for Allende with 37 Christian Democrats on the auction block.

17. In sum, I am less than confident of Friday’s verdict and am still assailed by doubts ventilated in #5 in this series that herewith ends.