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Telegram From the Department of State to All American Republic Diplomatic Posts

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Nota de Archivo: *Summary: This telegram transmitted the background briefing by U.S. "administration officials" (Kissinger) to journalists in Chicago outlining the Chilean election law pertaining to those elections with no clear majority and the overall ramifications of the recent Chilean election in which Marxist candidate Salvador Allende earned less than one and a half percent more than his opponent Jorge Alessandri. Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 774, Country Files, Latin America, Chile, Vol. II. Confidential; Exdis. Repeated immediate to the Consulates in Belize, Curacao, Nassau, and Paramaribo, USCINCSO, and the Embassies in Bonn, Canberra, London, Moscow, Ottawa, Paris, Seoul, Taipei, Tokyo, Rome, The Hague, and Wellington. Although the backgrounder is not attributed, in his memoirs, Kissinger described delivering the backgrounder himself to a group of Midwe*

154387. For Ambassador. Subject: September 16 Chicago Backgrounder on Chile. Ref: State 147753; State 154299; Santiago 3783.

1. FYI only. Following is text of backgrounder given in Chicago September 16 in answer to a specific question on Chile. The content of the backgrounder was embargoed until 6:00 p.m. EDT, September 19. It is attributable to "administration officials," direct quotation prohibited.

2. You should not repeat not comment on any stories appearing with regard to this. Following text should be considered as background comment to question asked as to view of "dangers and activities of Marxist elected in Chile." While reflecting White House views, the text and substance are not repeat not to be repeated publicly.

3. Text of backgrounder follows:

Quote: The election in Chile brought about a result in which the man backed by the Communists, and probably a Communist himself, had the largest number of votes by 30,000 over the next man, who was a conservative. He had about 36.1 per cent of the votes. So he had a plurality.

4. Qte: The two non-Communist parties between them had, of course, 64 per cent of the votes, so there is a non-Communist majority, but a Communist plurality. I say that just to get the picture straight.

5. Qte: According to the Chilean election law, when nobody gets a majority, the two highest candidates go to the Congress. The Congress then votes in a secret ballot and elects the President. That election is October 24th. In Chilean history, there is nothing to prevent it, and it would not be at all illogical for the Congress to say, "sixty-four percent of the people did not want a Communist government. A Communist government tends to be irreversible. Therefore, we are going to vote for the no. 2 man. This is perfectly within their constitutional prerogatives. However, the constitutional habit has developed that Congress votes for the man that gets the highest number of votes. But then, of course, it has never happened before that the

man with the highest number of votes happens to represent a non-democratic party, which tends to make his election pretty irreversible. I have yet to meet somebody who firmly believes that if Allende wins there is likely to be another free election in Chile.

6. Qte: So this is the situation that is now confronted by Chile. By a constitutional habit, the Congress votes for the man with the highest number of votes. The man with the highest number of votes is the candidate backed by the Communists.

7. Qte: There is the additional problem that the Congress is not elected at the same time as the President, so in the Congress, as it now stands, the total number of seats is 200. The group that backs Allende, including the Communists, has 82 seats, so that all Allende has to do is pick up 19 seats from the other parties, and he will be in. The conservative candidate, that is, the no. 2 candidate, around whom the rallying would have to take place, has only about 45 seats. So he would have to pick up 56 or something like that to make it.

8. Qte: So both the internal structure of the Congress, plus constitutional habits, would argue that Allende is likely to win the congressional election, barring something extraordinary. This problem is compounded by the fact that the non-Communist parties in Chile have been very divided among themselves, and you have the unusual phenomenon of people arguing, “well, maybe Allende won’t be so bad. Maybe he will run a democratic system”. And it is the usual revolutionary dilemma that, with a revolutionary seeking power, those who represent the non-revolutionary side do not all at the same time clearly understand what is happening. Therefore you have a great deal of confusion in Chile.

9. Qte: Now, it is fairly easy for one to predict that if Allende wins, there is a good chance that he will establish over a period of years some sort of Communist government. In that case you would have one not on an island off the coast which has not a traditional relationship and impact on Latin America, but in a major Latin American country you would have a Communist government, joining, for example, Argentina, which is already deeply divided, along a long frontier, joining Peru, which has already been heading in directions that have been difficult to deal with, and joining Bolivia, which has also gone in a more leftist, anti-U.S. direction, even without any of these developments.

10. Qte: So I don’t think we should delude ourselves that an Allende take-over in Chile would not present massive problems for us, and for democratic forces and for pro-U.S. forces in Latin America, and indeed to the whole Western Hemisphere. What would happen to the Western Hemisphere Defense Board, or to the Organization of American States, and so forth, is extremely problematical. So we are taking a close look at the situation. It is not one in which our capability for influence is very great at this particular moment now that matters have reached this particular point.

11. Qte: But you asked me about what the situation is. It is one of those situations which is not too happy for American interests. End qte.