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# Memorandum From the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Inter-American Affairs (Leddy) to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Nutter)

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***Nota de Archivo:*** *Summary: This memorandum examined the effect a Marxist government in Chile would have on the security interests of the United States. It highlighted potential intensification of Latin American political unrest, the threat raised by a possible Cuba-Chile Communist connection and growing nationalism in Latin America, and the concern that the Soviets could gain a military and ideological foothold in the Western Hemisphere. Source: Ford Library, National Security Adviser, Staff Secretary, Convenience Files, Box 8, "Chile." Secret; Sensitive.*

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The Impact of a Marxist Government in Chile on US Security Interests

Introduction.

An authoritarian Marxist government in Chile will have adverse implications for US security interests in Latin America. These implications may be divided into two interrelated groupings: (1) politico-military factors that could affect the position of the United States within the Latin American region and as a world power; and (2) the exclusion of US military activities from Chile, and the military activities which might be carried out by Chile, or its Communist allies in Chile. This memorandum discusses the major implications to U.S. security interests within both groupings.

Summary.

The following are implications for US security interests resulting from an Allende government in Chile:

—Disruption or derogation of the inter-American security system.

—Intensification of the growing anti-US nationalism in Latin America.

—Establishment of a "Chile-Cuba Axis," with a consequent erosion of U.S. hemispheric policy of isolating Cuba from the political and economic life of the region.

—Diminution of US prestige and influence in the rest of the world.

—Establishment of Chile as an ideological focal point for unifying the disparate Communist factions in South America and for the support and export of "revolutionaries."

—Incremental erosion of US military influence in South America, supplanted by the Soviets through their liberal arms transfer policies.

—Extirpation of US military influence and access in Chile.

—Adverse complication of US hemispheric military and naval operations in the event of major hostilities with the USSR.

—Creation of a threat to hemispheric security by expanding Soviet military and naval presence in Chile.

Major Politico-Military Implications.

The major politico-military implications of a Marxist government in Chile are:

—The effect on mutual security organizations.

—Its impetus to anti-US nationalism.

—The effect of a “Chile-Cuba Axis” on US-Cuba policy.

—Support of hemispheric subversion.

—Erosion of US military influence.

Security Organizations

United States security is tied to Latin America in a series of multilateral and bilateral security agreements of varying specificity which make up the inter-American security system. Although it may be argued that these security bonds are not meaningful in today’s context, they nonetheless provide the essential and often useful framework of US political and security policy in Latin America. This is of special importance in terms of the US status within the world arena. Most countries of the world consider Latin America in general (less Cuba) as something of a special preserve of the US. In the East-West confrontation, Latin America has been a sphere of US influence. Should this area turn overtly hostile, US prestige and influence in the world at large would suffer, affecting US security as well as political interests.

The two major planks of this framework are the Rio Pact (Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance) and the OAS. The Rio Pact, designed for hemispheric security, is specific in its provision that “an armed attack by any State against an American State shall be considered an attack against all the American States,” although the nature of the response is left to the individual State. The OAS can provide important politico-military support to United States actions to counter direct threats from outside the hemisphere, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. It also plays a useful role in intra-hemispheric disputes, although its effectiveness is sharply limited by a general reluctance among member states to grant “interventionist” powers. Of lesser practical importance is the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), which because of its lack of an organizational tie to the OAS has no meaningful outlet for its product. It is, however, useful as a device for exchanging and promoting ideas among the inter-American military.

It is against this structure that Allende’s efforts would early be directed. He has publicly proclaimed that his government would denounce “all treaties or agreements . . . which limit the sovereignty of Chile. . . .” The platform of Popular Unity (Allende’s coalition) calls for Chile to “denounce” the OAS and seek a “truly representative” organization. This raises the possibility of eventual Chilean withdrawal from the OAS or of such violent efforts to “restructure” it that it would no longer be viable. Under such circumstances, the OAS could find itself in a crisis; some governments would be influenced to follow the Chilean efforts to weaken the OAS and to work through some exclusively Latin American organization. While Allende’s references to the Rio Pact have not been as specific, his ultimate goals in this regard are expected to be the same as for the OAS. In the case of the IADB, the Cuban experience is instructive. It was necessary for the Board to vote to exclude Cuba from its classified transactions in April 1961, as prejudicial to the mission of the Board. In any event, the significance of an Allende effort to disrupt or dismantle the longstanding formal framework for inter-American security cooperation would be enhanced by its occurrence at a time when these traditional security arrangements are growing less

satisfying to Latin America.

Impetus to Anti-US Nationalism

Another threat to US security interests of major importance that would be increased by a Marxist government in Chile is the growing nationalism in Latin America, a nationalism which frequently has anti-US overtones. Radical attitudes or movements are gaining ground within the establishment of Latin American political life, including the military. There is a considerable sector of radical thought, both on the left and right, that gains strength from the continued inability of Latin America to achieve parity and prosperity in the modern world; both wings are articulate sources of a steady stream of anti-Americanism. This is nothing new. What is new is the threat they will present to US interests when taken in conjunction with a Soviet presence and a Soviet willingness to offer itself, if only partially, as an alternative to Latin dependence on the US. Allende, after provoking the termination of Chile's economic and security relationships with the US, would turn increasingly toward the Soviets. This would inspire leftist elements throughout the hemisphere, and the result would be a significant increase in pressure on the region's more moderate governments, with an inevitably adverse effect on US interests.

Chile-Cuba Axis

There are indications of the formation of a Chile-Cuba "axis" in hemispheric affairs. Although the military effect of such coordination would be slight, the support of Fidel Castro by one of the major continental Latin countries could serve to undermine the major aspect of US Cuban policy: the isolation of Cuba from the political and economic activity of the hemisphere. Significant erosion of this policy would embolden Fidel Castro to further adverturism, could reduce the cost to the Soviets of supporting Cuba, and would weaken our political support in a confrontation with the USSR over any future military activities in Cuba.

Support of Hemispheric Subversion

At present, despite the existence of rural insurgency in a few countries, and of considerable urban agitation in most countries, neither guerrilla movements nor urban terrorism pose serious threats to the immediate future of any national government. This results not only from the capability of the various countries to contain the insurgency threat at its present level, but also from the factionalism and weakness of the ideological motivations of the Latin American radical movements. The relatively weak subversive organizations have been unable to make much headway against the great apathy and inertia of Latin American society, particularly in the rural areas. Should the disparate Communist factions ever join forces, however, the insurgency problem could reach major proportions with a grave danger to US interests.

A Communist base in Chile from which "revolution" could be exported could well provide the focal point for unifying these disparate Communist factions. Initially, an Allende government might not go overtly beyond the Popular Unity's platform expression of "solidarity" with the "liberation" struggles and with attempts to build socialism. Allende and the Communists are aware of the risks of solidifying hostile hemispheric opinion should Chilean support for insurgencies in other countries become too blatantly obvious. On the other hand, there is evidence that Allende and his Communist supporters (both Chilean and international) will move rapidly and ruthlessly to consolidate their advantages. This hard line tendency will be encouraged by their conviction of US acceptance of events in Chile. Whatever the initial public actions of his government, Allende's talk of a Cuba-Chile "axis" from which to "launch" revolution foreshadows Chile's becoming a haven and a training ground, with Soviet assistance, for "revolutionaries." Individual Chileans have already been found in Bolivia's main guerrilla group. With a strong continental base, adequate financing, common ideological motivation and a prestigious "people's democracy" as the model, the insurgency movement in South America, over the long range, would take on a more respectable mantle of a bona fide political "revolutionary" movement as is the present case in Chile. By fanning and exploiting the growing Latin American sentiment for reducing the hemisphere's dependence on the US, the

Communists would probably seek to gain power through popular coalitions pledged to extirpate US influence and contact.

Erosion of US Military Influence

Probably the most insidious danger to US military security interests over the long range from a Marxist government in Chile allied with the Soviet Union is the potential for indirect and incremental erosion of US military influence and access to the region.

With knowledge of the dissatisfaction of the Latin American military over restrictive US military assistance and sales policies, and a desire to exploit the growing Latin American nationalistic proclivity to reduce its dependence on the US, the Soviets would probably offer to equip all or part of the Chilean armed forces with modern weapon systems at a supportable cost. The primary purpose of such a move would be to set up a model which others might wish to imitate. The Soviets followed the same pattern in the Middle East with much success and while the circumstances are different, the desires of the military in both areas are the same—modern and effective armed forces.

Because of Allende's expected policy of dealing cautiously with the Chilean military, at least in the early stages, a decision to seek Soviet military assistance may be delayed, especially if modern and significant Western equipment were also available. Eventually, however, it can be expected that Allende's "solidarity" with the socialist countries will result in reliance on Communist military equipment. And herein lies a potential for a serious erosion of US military influence in the region.

While the long tradition of using Western warships, aircraft, tanks, artillery, and other equipment among the various Latin American armed forces would have some weight, a tempting offer of more modern and comprehensive Communist equipment as replacements would probably be impossible to resist. This would be particularly true if the political climate evolved over time in a manner that made less objectionable an involvement with a "socialist" nation. To the extent that such a Soviet military assistance program would succeed, and some success could be expected, US military influence and access would be proportionately reduced in Latin America.

Major Military Implications.

The major implications of an Allende government in terms of US military security are:

—The probable exclusion of a US military presence from Chile.

—The possible use of Chilean bases and facilities by Soviet military forces and the threat such use could pose for US defenses, lines of communications to Latin America, and access to strategic materials.

—The possible long range impact on US access to bases and facilities in the rest of Latin America.

US Presence

Allende's Popular Unity platform calls for Chile to "denounce all treaties or agreements . . . and specifically the treaties of reciprocal assistance, pacts of material aid, and other pacts which Chile has signed with the United States." While Allende may be cautious, in deference to his own military, in fulfilling the pledge, there seems little doubt that the current US military presence in Chile will eventually be ordered withdrawn:

[1 paragraph (4 lines) not declassified]

—MILGP. Allende could permit the MILGP, in some form, to remain during the early period of his Administration as part of a policy of restraint toward his own military and until his position in the Presidency is consolidated. It is likely that activities in other sectors of US-Chilean relations (e.g., nationalization of US investments) may bring into play US laws

that will so exacerbate our relationships with the Chilean military as to force withdrawal of the MILGP. Plans for a possible withdrawal have been prepared. A relatively easy way for the Marxists to overcome Chilean military objections to severing military ties with the US would be the acceptance of large-scale dramatic Soviet military assistance. The Soviet capability and willingness to use military assistance to promote political interests have been amply demonstrated in many places, most recently in Libya.

—NASA. While not strictly military, NASA operates a tracking station in Chile that is useful in military space applications. As far as is known, Allende has not directly referred to NASA activities, although the presence of the station in Chile is by an agreement with the US which the Popular Front has pledged to denounce.

—Antarctic Activities. At the present time, US naval personnel destined for Antarctica are staged through Chile. The sensitivity of this activity was briefly demonstrated in a publicized misunderstanding in Chile over visas for these personnel during September 1970. Chilean unwillingness to cooperate would complicate support of these operations and would require alternative solutions. The US Navy is conducting a contingency study of this matter now.

—Wartime Operations. Of greater importance than the peacetime activities described in the preceding paragraphs would be the impact of a hostile or uncooperative Chile in the event of major hostilities with the USSR. Major US naval vessels (all the larger aircraft carriers) and many commercial vessels are now too large to use the Panama Canal and must use the passages controlled by or adjacent to Chile for inter-oceanic transit. The US has been able to depend on the use of Chilean facilities as necessary, and on the probable cooperation of the efficient Chilean Navy, in major hostilities. If the required facilities would have to be seized and defended from a hostile Chile, probably deleterious effects on cooperation by other Latin nations, and a certain diversion of US military forces, would result. This implication is discussed in more detail in subsequent paragraphs.

Soviet Presence

A Soviet military presence in Chile could take many forms, including a significant Soviet naval build-up operating from Chilean bases and more extensive, possibly unlimited, use of Chile’s unique geographical location in support of the Soviet space and FOBS program.

A direct strategic threat to the continental US from a Soviet ground or air force presence in Chile appears rather remote because of the great distance between Chile and the US, and the Soviet capability to launch such attacks from its existing bases. The presence of Soviet tactical ground and air forces in Chile would deter possible intervention by other Latin powers such as Brazil and Argentina, would present a military threat to other continental OAS members, and would increase the difficulty of the US seizure of required Chilean facilities in the event of US-USSR hostilities.

An expanding Soviet naval presence in Chile, on the other hand, could pose an eventual threat to US security of real significance. Despite the general ability of the US to supply its strategic materials from alternate sources in time of war, the USSR would probably attempt to interfere with Latin American trade routes. Since it is not likely that the USSR would, at present force levels, deploy large numbers of nuclear submarines from more decisive areas of confrontation to Latin American waters, the use of Chilean support bases would greatly increase the effectiveness of the more numerous conventional submarines. For either type submarine, the availability of bases in Chile would provide significant deployment and support advantages. US naval movement between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans would be jeopardized by the Soviet ability to interdict the passages around the Horn. Also, in a conflict where the Soviets undertook an anti-shipping campaign, it is not likely that the Panama Canal would escape attack.

To defend against this potential threat, the US would have to eliminate the Soviet forces in Chile, divert ASW forces to Latin American waters, or build up friendly Latin American navies to the point where the threat could be contained. The

Latin American navies now have virtually no capability against a sophisticated submarine threat, and construction of an adequate ASW force is beyond their present resources. If the US were to underwrite the substantial costs involved in developing such a capability, there could be no real assurance that those forces would be available when the US felt they were needed.

Conclusions.

In conclusion, the security problems created by a Marxist Chile would be extremely difficult to manage and would pose a serious threat to US interests not only in Chile, but eventually throughout South America. The conjunction of a major Marxist state, rising radical nationalism, and a Soviet willingness and ability to offer itself as an alternative to South American dependence on the US gives the threat major new proportions. Although the US has paid lip-service to its security interests in South America in the past, it has never accorded those interests a significant priority of effort. In the face of the present and developing threat and the potential future significance of South America, it is necessary that we re-examine this priority and its consequent policies. While it is difficult to judge exactly what role South America will play in the future security balance, by the year 2000 the population of Latin America is expected to reach a total of 700 million. If the scientific and economic growth of the region even approaches the population growth, the major countries of South America could be important to the US as free world leaders—or as major antagonists.