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Telegram From the Embassy in Chile to the Department of State

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Nota de Archivo: *Summary: Korry conveyed his understanding of the political climate in Chile just prior to the 1970 Presidential election, noting that the election was shaping up to be a battle between the independent conservative candidate, Jorge Alessandri, and the Popular Unity candidate, Salvador Allende, with Alessandri in the lead. Korry focused on the role the issue of "violence" would play in the upcoming election. Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 774, Country Files, Latin America, Chile, Vol. II. Secret; Limdis. Repeated to USCINCSO, Asunción, Bogotá, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Guatemala, La Paz, Lima, Mexico City, Montevideo, Panama, Quito, Rio de Janeiro, San Salvador, and Santo Domingo. Reference telegram 2210 from Santiago, June 12, is ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 14 CHILE.*

2714. Subj: Chile: Election Perspectives #4 (Part I of II parts). Ref: Santiago 2210.

1. Summary: After eight months of thundering boredom that served primarily to align the committed, the Chilean Presidential campaign has finally entered that final phase in which the uncommitted 15 to 20 percent of the electorate are in the driver's seat. Although the current lineup of Alessandri, Allende and Tomic appears to be congealing into that ranking, there is, at least theoretically, time to juggle the order. Increasingly, it is the present President that is emerging as a quasi-contender; the three candidates being what they unfortunately are, Eduardo Frei's comparative stature and influence grow daily. Since law and order dominated the electoral events and effluences of the past month, and since that issue revolves around governmental behavior, a lame duck can paddle up a froth of apologies or set his tail churning for solid shore. Frei has clearly decided to be purposeful [garble] consequently, the Presidential race for 1970 is taking on the appearance of the 1964 contest between Frei and Allende with Alessandri at this time the obvious beneficiary. (End summary)

2. "Shall we have a convulsed or tranquil republic," de Toqueville asked of France almost a century and a half ago. This question now dominates the Presidential campaign. It is the issue that has propelled Frei directly into the competition for ballots. All previous elections in Chile had their quotas of violence; the novelty in the current campaign is that there is one group (the MIR), small in number but with a not insignificant layer of sympathetic support in the Socialist Party, that is opposed to holding elections. It is far less the MIR's still modest activities than the responses to them of the parties and of the factions within parties that has shoved the law and order issue to the polemical forefront in the remaining 45 days of the campaign.

3. From the start, the Alessandri forces have sought what is called here the "violence" issue. Given a septuagenarian candidate without a program, at least none that is worthy of the name, and without a party, at least none (the Nacional) that he was willing to admit as his own, his shrewder supporters reckoned that any hope of broad mass appeal rested on the transfiguration of their palsied candidate into a patriarchal figure. To accomplish this metamorphosis in which Alessandri would be presented as the above-party restorer of serenity, the menace of violence and of convulsion was indispensable.

4. Left to their own devices, these Alessandristas would have continued to contrive clumsy provocations of the type that had their standard bearer venture in March into the strongest holds of Marxism such as the coal mining district. When one such foray led to a clash and to the stoning of Alessandri's (empty) auto, his backers in the media kicked the violence gong. Even if I were to assume that Alessandri's physique and spirit could tolerate more such escapades, this tactic could hardly suffice to provoke a meaningful response, particularly from the highest priority target group, the women.

5. It was the followers of Che and of Fidel, the well-educated and romantically inclined sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie who comprise the MIR, who fell in with the plans of the Alessandristas. Committed to revolution, this mod squad of Marxist delinquents set out to "convulse" the country and to do in both Tomic and Allende. A couple of bank robberies, a few powerful bomb explosions and some similar noisy but harmless derring-do the past two months drew the desired headlines. The police added to the bubble of words by stumbling across a guerrilla training camp in the south. The death of two high school students in Santiago in deliberate provocations of the police brought the "violence" controversy to a boil.

6. The Communists, Tomic and Allende were of one outraged and negative mind. Violence could only benefit Alessandri; violence could only disrupt their electoral tactics; violence could only divide their followers.

7. The PCCh, with its memories still fresh of its experience as an illegal and persecuted party, with its dread of a repressive military regime and with its conviction that the constitutional process offers it and the Soviets the most dividends, was clamped into an unwelcome bind. The party had just negotiated a modus vivendi with Fidel Castro after months of effort in Moscow in the hopes of keeping the MIR and sympathetic Socialists in docile line until the elections. It had steadfastly rejected Allende's pleas for funds so that at the minimum the PCCh alone would grow by its energetic efforts to register and to influence workers, campesinos, and intellectuals. The MIR tactic exposed the fundamental breach between Communists and Socialists, particularly that majority of the PSCentral Committee that is hard-line revolutionary, anti-Moscow and anti-Allende. Even more significant in electoral terms, violence alienated the weakest link in the Popular Front, the Radical Party, whose clientele is the biggest swing element of the electorate. Allende was forced to disown the MIR publicly. But he and the Communists could not disavow the Socialist insistence to exploit the violence by a general strike last week, a tactic that failed miserably, that produced abrasive recriminations within the Popular Unity camp and that briefly united the PDC, the GOC and the Alessandristas.

8. For Tomic and the PDC, violence was no less a damaging issue. The ex-Ambassador to Washington has predicated his campaign on an appeal to the left, on his de facto rebaptism of his party as "the Christian left" and on his assumption that he will be elected President by the Congress and govern thereafter with Communist cooperation. His vision of a new society incorporates the beliefs that Chile today is not only inefficient because of its neo-capitalist structure but unjust because of its "institutionalized violence". This latter term is an echo from many Roman Catholic as well as Marxist documents and refers both to the imperfect distribution of income and [garble] and to police and armed forces that maintain these legalized asymmetries. In the crunch over "violence", Tomic, who is anything but inconsistent, stuck to his guns; he hammered at institutionalized violence while seeking to avoid an open split with the Frei govt. While paying homage to the high reputation of Chile's carabineros, he implicitly blamed Frei for not avoiding violence and pressed this past weekend for the removal of the head of the carabineros and the Minister of Interior.

9. Frei rejected the demand and continued the subtle but no less steady drift from Tomic and his platform. Following up the June nationwide TV-radio denunciation by the MinInterior of MIR and rpt [PR] and Socialists for provoking violence, Frei in his northern tour last week rejected in toto the institutionalized violence theory to concentrate his fire on the provocateurs and to emphasize that his govt was going to maintain law and order by conventional means albeit without seeking confrontations. More interesting for its political impact is the stress that Frei is giving to "liberty" and to "democracy", the two words that distinguish his party and his philosophy clearly from that of Marxist-Leninists and the

two words that Tomic won't employ against Allende or the Communists.

10. These plays within plays have offered that singular character Alessandri the chance to slip into the role he has long been seeking. "Alessandri is tranquility" is the slogan that is heard on all radio stations. To this has been added a massive publicity drive that the Communists call the campaign of terror and the Nacionales term the campaign of truth. Its message is simple: that Allende means a Communist regime in Chile. This ploy provided Frei a big majority over Allende in 1964 and every Chilean political group is agreed that this fear is a powerful dissuader to the two groups that will determine the outcome of this election—the women and the Radical clientele. (End Part I)