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Nota de Archivo: *Summary: This cable reported that Chilean Army General Canales declared that his military coup movement was ready to move against the Allende government. In order for the military government to be accepted by the civilians, however, there needed to be a valid reason to overthrow the administration. Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 776, Country Files, Latin America, Chile, Vol. VII. Secret; No Foreign Dissem; Controlled Dissem; No Dissem Abroad. Distribution of the cable was limited to Kissinger in the White House, Cline in the State Department, and Lieutenant General Bennett in DIA. A covering memorandum from Latimer to Kissinger stated, "The attached CIA report calls attention to contingency coup plotting by a Chilean general. The CIA station chief does not believe General Canales will attempt a coup in the immediate future but he is ready to move*

Chile

11 January 1972

Continuing Preparations by General Canales for a Coup Attempt Against the Chilean Government; Claim by Canales of Increased Capability for a Coup

Chile, Santiago (12 January 1972)

[4 lines not declassified]

TDCS DB–315/00374–72. Summary. On 11 January Army General Canales declared that his military coup movement is ready to move against the Chilean Government at any time. He stressed, however, that a valid reason must exist for any such move, in order to ensure that the subsequent military government would be accepted by a majority of the civilian population. Canales claimed that his capabilities to carry out a successful coup have increased during the past two months, despite the attempts by the government to remove those officers who are considered to be opposed to the present regime from important commands in the Santiago area. Canales made some references to the support he enjoys among the Chilean military and revealed that his tactical plans simply call for the implementation of existing contingency plans, with which the army unit commanders are already familiar. End summary.

1. In a conversation [less than 1 line not declassified] on 11 January 1972 General Canales, former Director of the War Academy, declared that the Chilean armed forces are ready to take over the Chilean Government at any time. However, he stressed that the military must wait until a very valid reason exists in order that the subsequent military government would be accepted by a majority of the civilian population.

2. In discussing possible pretexts, Canales mentioned that he would consider it sufficient justification should a number of deaths occur as a result of conflicts between opposition and government forces in the 16 January special by-elections, should the government lose the by-elections and then refuse to abide by the results, or should the government use

subterfuge to avoid or refuse to abide by a possible adverse decision by the constitutional tribunal which is considering the constitutionality of Allende's appointment of Jose Toha as acting Minister of Defense.

3. (Field comment: The special by-elections entail the election of a Deputy from Linares Province and a Senator from Colchagua and O'Higgins Provinces. There is no indication that the government would refuse to accept the electoral results. Former Interior Minister Toha was automatically suspended from his position upon the approval by the House of Deputies of the impeachment charges against him. The charges are now to be considered by the Chilean Senate. On 7 January, the day following the House action, President Allende appointed Toha acting Minister of Defense. The political opposition considers this action unconstitutional and has announced that it will ask that the special constitutional tribunal be constituted to consider the case. A field grade officer who is well informed on internal army politics [less than 1 line not declassified] commented on 13 January that the Toha episode has not created much of an impact within the army.)

4. Canales said that should his coup plans come to fruition, his tactics will simply be to put into operation one of the existing military contingency plans, with which all unit commanders are familiar. (Source comment: Canales did not reveal what plans he has to seize the Ministry of Defense and its communication facilities in order to be able to issue the necessary orders to implement the contingency plans.)

5. Canales also remarked that his capabilities within the army to mount a successful coup are greater at the present time than they were two months ago, despite the fact that the recent, end-of-year changes in military assignments were studied carefully by the U.P. government and, within its capability, were made with the political expedient in mind of removing from key positions those officers who are known to be opposed to the regime. He mentioned that his own removal from the War Academy and that of Colonel Carlos Forrestier from the Infantry School are examples of the governmental maneuvering.

6. Nevertheless, Canales claimed to have the unconditional loyalty of about 80 middle grade officers, as a result of his two years at the War Academy, plus most of the officers who served with him on the faculty of the Academy, many of whom now command regiments. Specifically, Canales said that Colonel Luis Joaquin Ramirez Pinedo, the new Tacna artillery regiment commander, who was his deputy at the war college; and Colonel Felipe Geiger, new Buin infantry regiment commander, will support him in any coup effort. He added that Colonel Leonil Konig Altermatt, who replaced Colonel Forrestier at the Infantry School, is an excellent officer and is opposed to the regime; however, since Konig has just recently come to Santiago, Canales said he has not had time to bring him into his coup movement. Canales remarked that his biggest problem at the present time is not the enlistment of additional support among key regimental commanders, but rather the ability to restrain his supporters until the proper time and to prevent any premature action.

7. Canales did lament the upcoming transfer of Admiral Luis Eberhard, former Commander of the First Naval Zone, to Washington, D.C., since he had been counting heavily on Eberhard, who had 10,000 sailors and marines under his command, to take over and hold the port city of Valparaiso. However, Canales said that he intends to confer with Eberhard before his departure to see who can be brought in as a replacement. (Field comment: Admiral Jose Merino is Eberhard's replacement as head of the First Naval District.) (Source comment: Admiral Daniel Arellano, who is scheduled to replace Merino as fleet commander, is a weak officer with a drinking problem. Arellano refused to cooperate in the abortive coup attempt in October 1970 which was designed to prevent Allende from being named President of Chile.)

8. (Field comment: The foregoing information is still largely insufficient to make an accurate judgment on the extent of his movement or the probability of success, should he launch a coup. However, the foregoing does indicate that Canales himself feels confident of his capabilities and is marking time until he is presented with the required pre-text with which to justify his actions. [less than 1 line not declassified] TDCS–314/14007–71, and [less than 1 line not declassified] TDCS DB–315/00139–72, from a source whose reliability has not been fully tested, reported that Lieutenant Colonel Carol

Urzua, Commander of the Puente Alto Engineering Regiment, was involved in military coup plotting. The latter reference indicated that the plotters were also looking for the necessary pretext for their coup attempt. Since Urzua has been reported in the past to be a follower of Colonel Carlos Forrestier, who is considered to be General Canales' right-hand man, there is a possibility of a connection between the Urzua plotting and that of General Canales. Because Canales is apparently only waiting until a suitable pretext is present before launching his coup attempt, the attempt could occur at any time; however, barring some political miscalculation by President Allende, or a sudden outbreak of violence between the left and the right in Chile, it is not expected that Canales will attempt to move in the immediate future.)

9. Field dissem: Embassy (Ambassador only) at Santiago.