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CHILE: COUP PROSPECTS

Coup rumblings within and outside the military have increased in recent days as October 24 approaches, the date when Salvador Allende is expected to be declared president-elect by the Congress. A well-coordinated institutional effort to block Allende and take over the government is unlikely. A precipitous move by several military units, however, is more possible than was the case several weeks ago. Such a move would present the leaders of the armed forces with a dilemma.

Increasing number of coup scenarios. Retired General Viaux, an inveterate conspirer who led last October's "Tacnazo" army mutiny, has been linked with right-wing terrorist bombings whose objective is to provoke Allende's followers into reacting with violence, leading to a general breakdown in public order and intervention by the military. (Thus far the left has not responded to the provocations.) Another plot apparently is being orchestrated by [

] Under this plan, army units in southern

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Dept of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.
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Valdivia and Concepcion which reportedly are behind him would move against the government, thus forcing the key units in the Santiago capital area to make a decision quickly under pressure. The assumption of the plotters is that such units would join the coup in the name of military unity and be relieved at the opportunity of stopping Allende. A more classic coup would involve an agreement among the military and carabinero leaders to act in unison and simply impose a new government. A fourth possibility which has recently been reported involves a civilian-military action aimed at installing a nationalistic and progressive government on the style of Velasco in Peru.

Recent [redacted] reporting has differed from earlier information by singling out several units as apparently being committed to some effort to prevent Allende from coming to power. The earlier reports dealt only with a rather general feeling of concern among high level officers that something should be done.

Stumbling blocks. Although many military men seem to be viewing the prospect of an Allende administration with increasing concern, there are many factors militating against a stop-Allende move. President Frei has not openly encouraged them, apparently preferring to sit back and be the "martyr" of a move by the military. The respected and powerful Army Commander Schneider is opposed to intervention, arguing that the constitutional process must be allowed to play itself out. The prospect that preventing Allende's accession would lead to widespread public disturbances if not civil war douses the ardor of some. The military long have viewed the violation of the constitution or acts

against the integrity of the military institution as the only justification for intervention; such acts could not occur until after Allende takes office. The military would want broad popular support to accompany a move, and at present most Chileans seem to have accepted the fact that Allende will be inaugurated on November 4. Allende and his aides have been privately assuring military leaders that they have nothing to fear and some apparently have been won over to the Allende team. With all these factors discouraging a consensus to act against Allende, the Chilean military lack that sense of legitimacy and capacity to rule that is apt to be needed before they move. Many would like to wake up tomorrow and find the Allende contingency erased from the scene but are unwilling to step forward and do anything to bring this about.

Prospects. During the next few weeks, a well-coordinated institutional move against Allende is unlikely. An attempt by some elements of the security forces--with the objective of precipitating an institutional move--is judged, however, to be more possible than was thought to be the case several weeks ago. It's impossible to predict the outcome of a forcing play. The military high command and individual unit commanders would be faced with two extremely unattractive alternatives: (1) suppression of the rebellion, allowing Allende to take power with the military demoralized and split; and (2) support of the rebellion, with a high degree of risk of grave confrontation with mass civilian elements.

Keen awareness of these alternatives presumably will continue to motivate General Schneider to do all possible to dampen any possible "forcing play".

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