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RA 52

MEMORANDUM

March 12, 1970

TO : INR/DDC - Mr. Wymberley Coerr

FROM : INR/DDC - James R. Gardner

SUBJECT: Chilean Elections

Attached is a draft ARA cover memorandum to Ambassador Johnson recommending that he approve the proposal that we take certain covert political actions in Chile designed to weaken the Popular Unity Coalition in the September 1970 Presidential elections. The draft is a long one, but the issues are complicated and merit closer examination than ordinarily is extended in these cover memorandums. Bill Stedman, who is taking over Bolivia and Chile in addition to his present assignment of Ecuador and Peru, has gone over the draft, revised it slightly, and approves.

I attach also a copy of Embassy Santiago's suggested draft CASP on Chile. The first few pages are relevant to the consideration of our problem. Attached also is a outgoing telegram to Santiago that asks for an in-depth analysis of the consequence of an Allende victory similar to the analysis that the present CASP draft has on potential Alessandri or Tomic administrations. I don't know what our time frame is, but it does seem to me that it would be unsound to ask for 40 Committee endorsement of operations to prevent a UP victory before we have had a chance maturely to consider the Embassy's forthcoming estimate of the significance of a Allende victory. Perhaps the Embassy's response to the State request will come in quickly enough to make this point an academic one.

I told you last week that I would make up my mind by the beginning of this week whether or not I favored the proposed operations. On the basis of the evidence now in hand, I have decided that, albeit reluctantly, I do favor the proposal. My reasons are not much more persuasive than those I have had in the past. I would add to them another, which is becoming of growing importanct to me as I consider it: I think that the repercussions of an Allende victory in Chile would be quite bad for us in the rest of Latin America and would lend special encouragement to those elements in Bolivia and Chile who find it both profitable and emotionally pleasing to attack the US and US interests.

This does not mean that I believe that the arguments against the proposal are not important. The practice or custom of intervening in other peoples elections is becoming raddled and of increasingly dubious long-run value. So it is in Chile. I have not prepared

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a draft memorandum disapproving the proposal, as I thought at the end of last week I would. I would be glad to do so if you so wish. In the meantime, for whatever use it might be, there follows a listing of points that I think might be made in such a memo. I am sure the list is not inclusive.

(1) As stated the proposal is to weaken the UP, not to support either Alessandri or Tomic. It is nonetheless clear that our operations would in fact assist both Alessandri and Tomic, and that the chief beneficiary in the particular 1970 Chilean electorial context would probably be Allende. The prospect of an Alessandri government is not sufficiently more attractive than the prospect of an UP government to convince us that we should approve the proposed operation.

(2) We have been covertly intervening in the Chilean political process for some eight years now in an effort to weaken left forces. The left has maintained its strength notwithstanding, and promises to continue to do so. At some point the Chileans are going to have to be left to their own political devices.

(3) The assertion is made that a UP victory could well produce a Castro-like government in Chile. We are unsure of the soundness of this assertion. Embassy Santiago's reply to the Department's request for an analysis of the results of a Alessandri victory will be relevant to this point.

(4) There is throughout Latin America a growing sensitivity, whether well founded or not, to allegations of CIA intervention in Latin affairs. This sensitivity is especially acute in Chile. We are of course aware of the Agency's confidence that the proposed operation will be a secure one. The costs to us, were the proposed operation exposed, would be so high both in Chile and elsewhere that we nonetheless are unconvinced that the marginal advantages that we might gain are worth the potential price.

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