(RA53)

EXCISE

Chile Project (#S19990030)
U.S. Department of State
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UNCLASSIFIED [redacted]

MEMORANDUM

March 17, 1970

TO : J - Ambassador Johnson

THROUGH: INR/DDC - Mr. Wymberley Coerr

FROM : ARA - John H. Crimmins

EXCISE

Dept of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.
( ) Classify as (-) Extend as (-) Downgrade to ____
Date 1/31/01 Declassify on ____ Reason 25X1

SUBJECT: Proposal for Political Action in Chile

Attached is a memorandum that asks for 40 Committee endorsement of certain covert political actions in Chile designed to reduce the possibility of a victory in the September 1970 presidential elections by the Popular Unity (UP), a coalition of left-wing groups headed by the Communist and the Socialist parties.*

ARA recommends that you support the proposal.

There are three principal candidates in the election: former President Jorge Alessandri of the conservative Nationalist Party (PN), Radimiro Tomic of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) and UP nominee Salvador Allende, leader of the pro-Castro, rigidly doctrinaire Socialist Party (PS). The race promises to be close: Alessandri, whose strength may be at its peak, now appears to be in the lead with Allende running second and Tomic third. According to a rough estimate by Ambassador Korry in mid-January, the percentage of the vote that each would get as of that time was Alessandri, 35 percent; Allende, 30 percent; and Tomic 25 percent, with the remaining votes, some 10 percent of the total, more or less, undecided.

ARA believes that election of the UP candidate would be seriously detrimental to our interests and that therefore a limited operation should be undertaken to try to steer as many as possible of the uncommitted votes away from Allende. Neither this nor any other effort, on the other hand, should be taken to assist directly either Alessandri or Tomic.

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* Past USG Special Group and 303 Committee interest in Chilean election issues has included approval in 1962 [redacted] to strengthen the Christian Democratic Party; [redacted] also in 1963 [redacted] to Radical Party, Democratic Front candidate Senator Duran to attract votes from FRAP in the 1964 presidential elections; $3 million to support Frei's candidacy in the 1964 presidential elections; $175,000 to selected candidates in the March 1965 elections to help them against FRAP candidates [redacted] and in 1968 [redacted] help selected moderate candidates in the 1969 congressional elections, to conduct a broad-spectrum anti-FRAP propaganda operation, and to help a break-away group of the Socialist Party.

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Although both are acceptable to us, both have drawbacks from our point of view. Alessandri's election would not only represent a victory of conservative and right-wing forces whose programs offer no substantial hope of meeting Chile's economic and political problems, but it also, according to Ambassador Korry, could introduce strains into Chilean society that might ultimately produce a military dictatorship under left-wing influence. Tomic, for his part, has small chance of winning; he is an unreliable quantity at best, who, even if elected, would probably take a number of attitudes contrary to US interests. The focus of our effort should therefore be directed not on the election of either Tomic or Alessandri, but on the defeat and consequent weakening and disintegration of the UP.

The covert actions proposed are essentially three:

1) Use of a propaganda mechanism that was established during the March 1969 Congressional elections [redacted] The cost of this program is estimated at [redacted]

2) Support to moderates of the Radical Party (PR) that in mid-1969 split from the PR (which has since joined UP ranks) to form the Democratic Radical Party (PDR). With the approval of Ambassador Korry, some [redacted] was spent on this group in the last half of 1969 to help it establish itself as a political base capable of significant opposition to the UP. It is estimated that the total overall cost of assistance to the PDR will run in the neighborhood of [redacted] Because the intent of the projected operation is not to help Alessandri, the memorandum recognized that both phases of the operation would have to be carefully monitored to ensure that our support would end should either take on a pro-Alessandri rather than an anti-UP cast.

3) A miscellany of other political actions [redacted] all aimed at weakening the UP. These represent a continuation of normal unilateral operations in Chile, focused for the immediate future on the election issues.

It is hard to say at this point whether Alessandri or Tomic would be the chief indirect beneficiary of the program. The PDR leaders intend themselves to support Alessandri; on the other hand, votes that might go to UP but for the projected program are more likely to be deflected

to the left-leaning Tomic than to the conservative Alessandri. If no candidate wins an absolute popular majority, the Chilean Congress will choose the winner from the top two candidates. In such circumstances in the past Congress has traditionally supported the candidate who led in the popular vote. There is of course no guarantee that the tradition would hold this year, but it is nonetheless true that the greater the popular margin for Alessandri the more likely it is that he would carry the Congress. It would thus seem that votes drawn from Allende that go to third place Tomic would actually benefit the leading Alessandri more than Tomic.

ARA believes that the establishment of a Marxist or Pouplar front government in Chile would not only be harmful to our specific interests in that country, but that it also would lend encouragement and prestige to extremist groups in other countries -- most immediately, Bolivia and Peru.

The security risks appear low from a technical point of view. The [redacted] CIA is confident of their security. It is nonetheless important to note that Chile is currently sensitized to charges of CIA intervention. There is and will continue to be a residue of suspicion which will result in special watchfulness by various Chilean elements. The knowledge by some Chileans of our involvement in previous elections will only intensify this problem, especially since the projected program will, for reasons apart from our own purposes, tend to benefit Alessandri.

It seems fair to say that on balance there is a chance that our efforts could influence a small but probably critical margin of votes, and that the operation can be conducted with justified expectations of considerable security. If we do not take what appears to be a relative secure opportunity to forestall a UP triumph, we are vulnerable to a charge, were Allende to win, of having done nothing to prevent his victory. Recognizing that the issue is a close one, ARA endorses the limited proposal on the understanding that our support will be withdrawn from any phase of the program that begins to take on a pro-Alessandri rather than an anti-UP cast.

Recommendation

I recommend that you support the proposal for limited political action to weaken UP prospects in the 1970 Chilean Presidential elections.

Attachment:
As stated.
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