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18 September 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT : Discussion of Chilean Political Situation

PARTICIPANTS: Richard Helms, Director of CIA



BACKGROUND:

The Chilean presidential election was held on 4 September 1970. Socialist Senator Salvador Allende, the candidate of the Popular Unity (UP) - a coalition of the pro-Cuban Socialist Party (PS), the Communist Party (PCCh), the leftist-led Radical Party (PR) and other small leftist groups - won a plurality (36.3%) of the votes cast in a three-way race. Jorge Alessandri, independent candidate of the center right, including the National Party (PN), was generally expected to come in first, but was a close second with 35%. Radomiro Tomic, candidate of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), came in third with 27.8%.

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The Chilean constitution requires that because no candidate received a majority of the votes cast, the Congress will meet on 24 October to elect a president from the two top vote-getters. The Congress has selected the top vote-getter on the three occasions in this century when no candidate received the required majority. Alessandri has said publicly that if Congress elects him president he will resign, thereby forcing a new presidential election in which he would not be a candidate. Tomic, the Christian Democratic candidate, has publicly recognized Allende's victory. Outgoing President Eduardo Frei, a Christian Democrat who was not eligible to run on 4 September, would qualify in a new election if Alessandri were elected by the Congress and then resigned. Frei has said that constitutionally he cannot recognize anyone as president until after the Congress has voted. At present the PDC holds the 75 swing votes in Congress.]

[REDACTED] Mr. Helms attended the meeting at the request of Dr. Henry Kissinger who, with Mr. John Mitchell, the Attorney General, had met earlier with [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] expressed the following views on the Chilean political situation:

a. Reason for Alessandri's Loss

~~The abstention figure was 16%, indicating that~~  
the Alessandri forces had failed to get out the precinct vote. Women voters probably comprised the bulk of the

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5% increase over the 1964 abstention figure. [REDACTED] that it was "too bad that we could not have been allowed to take votes away from Tomic." This was a reference to the U.S. Government caveat which limited [REDACTED] efforts on our behalf to an anti-Allende campaign with no direct support to Alessandri.

b. Possibility of Constitutional Solution

On election night, Frei, after allowing Allende to have a victory parade, heard of Alessandri's plan to try to win the presidency on 24 October and then step down in favor of a new election which would probably find Frei opposing Allende. Frei sent Bernardo Leighton, an influential Christian Democrat national deputy as his emissary to Alessandri. Their discussions resulted in Alessandri's statement issued several days later (9 September) that he was not conceding to Allende and that he would resign if elected by the Congress. The chances of Alessandri's being named president are slim. Allende needs at most only 18 additional Congressional votes to secure his victory in the full Congress of 200. Alessandri, on the other hand, needs to attract 58 votes, most of them from the PDC. Frei is "scared blue" of Allende's coming to power, but he can only count on 20 PDC Congressmen to vote for Alessandri. [REDACTED] has heard that some people may be "getting scared." The Communists are circulating blacklists with the names of PDC bureaucrats. These blacklists may boomerang against the Communists to the extent that PDC Congressmen who were neutral or inclined to vote for Allende may decide to vote for Alessandri.

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The Congressional route to prevent Allende from coming to power, while remote, should not be ignored, but it entails the following risks:

- 1) It might not work, and then what? (The new president takes office on 4 November.)
- 2) Some Congressmen might move too soon or announce their intention prematurely, thereby triggering the Communists to "move into the streets."

3) Retired General Roberto Viaux, leader of the military dissension of October 1969, [redacted] or "some other nut" might try to stage a coup, thereby precluding any serious effort. (Comment: Viaux, in October 1969, led a 24-hour rebellion of the Tacna Artillery Regiment in Santiago to express military dissatisfaction with its poor pay and equipment. The rebellion ended without bloodshed when the government promised to meet some of Viaux's demands. Viaux had widespread moral support because of overall dissatisfaction in the military. He was convicted of "military rebellion" and eventually placed on parole. At present he does not appear to have substantial support among active duty military personnel.)

C. Timing for Possible Military Action

By mid-October after the PDC Congress, it should be clear what will happen on 24 October in the Congress. [redacted] "Can we run the risk that the Alessandri/Frei plan will work?"