

Chile Project (#S199900030)
U.S. Department of State
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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August 17, 1970

MEMORANDUM

TO : J - Ambassador Johnson

Dept of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir

FROM : ARA - Charles A. Meyer

() Classify as (1) Extend as (5) Downgrade to _____
Date 1/31/01 Declassify on _____ Reason 25X1

SUBJECT: NSSM-97: Extreme Option - Overthrow of Allende

In the attached memorandum we examine the [redacted] extreme option to use if Allende is elected. This option assumes that an Allende government would be a sufficiently great security threat to the U.S. to justify a covert effort to overthrow him.

We note in the memorandum that the Chilean military is the only instrument in Chile capable of overthrowing Allende, but we hold out little promise that the military would move to this end on its own initiative, short of acts by Allende that were flagrantly subversive of Chilean institutions or directly menacing to the military itself. Allende is too cautious of the armed forces to act in such manner in the near future, and we expect that he will use his powers of appointment and promotion to effectively neutralize these forces in the long run.

Our knowledge of the relations that conservative Chilean political and business leaders have with the military is not full enough to let us judge whether these leaders could stimulate a military move against Allende. We doubt, however, that the military leaders would act unless they themselves were predisposed to do so. Nor do we believe that they would respond to a possible initiative by [redacted] which, as far as we can tell, has no specific ideas anyway about overthrowing Allende.

As for the part that the U.S. might play, we believe that U.S. support would be no more than a marginal factor in the calculation of the Chilean military. Even were we to develop our assets among the Chilean military to the point that we could ultimately suggest or try to sponsor military action against Allende, we believe that in this case also the Chilean military must itself be already disposed to move on Allende were our efforts to have any effect.

The advantages flowing from U.S. involvement with a successful Chilean military coup would be that we would be rid of the threat posed to us by an Allende government, and that moderate Chilean forces would have demonstrated their unwillingness to see Chile become an authoritarian Marxist state. The disadvantages, however,

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of the fourth option are grave. There is little substantial prospect that the Chilean armed forces would attempt to overthrow Allende, even with U.S. stimulation, and there is no way to judge whether the attempt would succeed if made. The risk that our hand would be exposed is real. Exposure in an unsuccessful coup would involve costs that would be prohibitively high in our relations in Chile, in the hemisphere, and elsewhere in the world. Even were the coup successful, exposure would involve costs only marginally less serious in all these areas.

Recommendation

That you oppose adoption [REDACTED] on the grounds that its prospects of success are poor and its risks prohibitively high.

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'Extreme Option: Overthrow Allende'

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