

U.S. Covert Intervention in Chile: Planning to Block Allende Began Long before September 1970 Election

Nixon Alerted in Advance to Date of Coup, Retired CIA Operative Writes in Foreign Affairs

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Covert U.S. planning to block the democratic election of Salvador Allende in Chile began weeks before his September 4, 1970, victory, according to just declassified minutes of an August 19, 1970, meeting of the high-level interagency committee known as the Special Review Group, chaired by National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. “Kissinger asked that the plan be as precise as possible and include what orders would be given September 5, to whom, and in what way,” as the summary recorded Kissinger’s instructions to CIA Director Richard Helms. “Kissinger said we should present to the President an action plan to prevent [the Chilean Congress from ratifying] an Allende victory...and noted that the President may decide to move even if we do not recommend it.”

The document is one of a compendium of some 366 records released by the State Department as part of its *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series. The much-delayed collection, titled “Chile: 1969-1973,” addresses Richard Nixon’s and Kissinger’s efforts to destabilize the democratically elected Socialist government of Salvador Allende, and the U.S.-supported coup that brought General Augusto Pinochet to power in 1973. The controversial volume was edited by two former officials of the State Department’s Office of the Historian, James Siekmeier and James McElveen.

“This collection represents a substantive step forward in opening the historical record on U.S. intervention in Chile,” said Peter Kornbluh, who directs the Chile documentation project at the National Security Archive, and is the author of *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*. Kornbluh called on the State Department to continue to pursue the declassification of all relevant records on the U.S. role in Chile, including all records of CIA contacts with the Chilean military leading up to the September 11, 1973, coup; CIA funding for the truckers’ strike as part of the “destabilization” campaign, and CIA intelligence on the executions of two U.S. citizens in the wake of the military takeover, Charles Horman and Frank Teruggi.

The FRUS series is scheduled to release an electronic supplement of additional records in the fall, and to publish another volume, *Chile, 1973-1976*, next year. “The next volume could advance the historical record on CIA support for the Chilean secret police, DINA, CIA knowledge of Operation Condor, and Pinochet’s act of international terrorism in Washington D.C. that killed Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpén Moffitt,” Kornbluh suggested.

In the aftermath of General Augusto Pinochet’s arrest in October 1998, the National Security Archive, along with victims of the Pinochet regime, led a campaign to press the Clinton administration to declassify the still-secret documents on Chile, the coup and the repression that followed. Some 23,000 NSC, State Department, Defense Department and CIA records were released. Some of those have been included in the new FRUS collection which contains a set of meeting memoranda of the “40 Committee” — an interagency group chaired by Henry Kissinger which oversaw covert operations in Chile, as well as dozens of formerly secret cables, including CIA communications.

The release of the records comes amidst renewed debate over the CIA role in supporting the military coup in Chile. The forthcoming issue of *Foreign Affairs* contains an article by former CIA operative Jack Devine, “What Really Happened in Chile: the CIA, the Coup Against Allende, and the Rise of Pinochet,” which reveals that intelligence he obtained on September 9, 1973, alerted President Nixon in advance to the timing of the coup. “I sent CIA headquarters in Langley a special type of top-secret cable known as a CRITIC, which takes priority over all other cables and goes directly to the highest levels of government. President Richard Nixon and other top U.S. policymakers received it immediately. ‘A coup attempt will be initiated on 11 September,’ the cable read.”

Nevertheless, Devine asserts that the CIA “did not plot with the Chilean military to overthrow Allende in 1973.”

However, according to a transcript of the first phone conversation between Kissinger and Nixon following the coup, when the President asked if “our hand” showed in the coup, Kissinger explained that “we didn’t do it,” in terms of direct participation in the military actions: “I mean we helped them,” Kissinger continued. “[deleted word] created the conditions as great as possible.”

The Kissinger-Nixon transcript is reproduced in the 2013 edition of [The Pinochet File](#).

Read the FRUS volume [here](#).

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