

12-2022

## U.S. Hegemonic Control in Latin America: The 1973 Coup in Chile

Seth Wilbur

University of New Orleans, sawilbur@uno.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>



Part of the [Diplomatic History Commons](#), [Latin American History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wilbur, Seth, "U.S. Hegemonic Control in Latin America: The 1973 Coup in Chile" (2022). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 3030.

<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/3030>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uno.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uno.edu).

U.S. Hegemonic Control in Latin America: The 1973 Coup in Chile

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
History

By

Seth Wilbur

B.A., University of Texas at Austin, 2016  
M.A., Texas A&M University at Commerce, 2018

December 2022

Copyright 2022, Seth Wilbur

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iv
Introduction .....	1
Historiography .....	8
Kissinger and Nixon: The Official Line on U.S. Involvement in the Chilean Coup .....	21
U.S. Intervention in Chile: From Kennedy to Nixon .....	25
Reasons for U.S. Involvement in the Allende Coup .....	36
Conclusion .....	46
Bibliography .....	48
Vita .....	51

## Abstract

On September 11, 1973, the Chilean armed forces staged a coup d'état against their democratically elected and first socialist president, Salvador Allende. The coup ended in Allende's death and seventeen years of military dictatorship under the auspices of General Augusto Pinochet. Although seemingly a domestic affair, the United States executive branch under the leadership of President Richard Nixon played a significant role in facilitating the coup and it is unlikely the coup would have occurred without U.S. support. While contemporary sources still point to American fears over communist incursion in the western hemisphere as the principal reason for U.S. involvement and support for the coup, the American intelligence and foreign policy community was much more preoccupied with maintaining U.S. hegemony in the western hemisphere and preventing rogue states from challenging that hegemony, especially through free and fair elections. Although this point is discussed in some of the literature on the subject, these works focus mainly on proving U.S. culpability rather than distinguishing the principal reason for its intervention. This paper directly points to the desire to maintain political hegemony in Latin America as the principal reason for intervention, using American declassified source material as the main line of evidence.

Keywords: 1973 Chilean Coup; Hegemony; Henry Kissinger; Salvador Allende; Richard Nixon

## Introduction

On September 11, 1973, the Chilean armed forces led a coup against the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende Gossens, the socialist leader of the *Unidad Popular* (a leftwing political coalition of Chilean Socialists, Communists, Leftist Christians, and Radicals). Until this point, Chile had been the strongest democracy in Latin America, a region dominated by military regimes and oligarchical dynasties. Throughout the nineteen sixties and seventies, several fledgling democracies in Latin America fell to military dictatorships. This was especially true for Chile's South American neighbors. Bolivia and Brazil succumbed to military dictatorships in 1964, Argentina in 1966, and Peru in 1968.<sup>1</sup> Despite the growing authoritarianism of its neighbors, to many, Chile seemed on a path to maintain its democratic tradition, providing an example of democratic success for the rest of Latin America. It had a long history of republican government stretching back to the early nineteenth century. Throughout the twentieth century, Chilean politics was composed of a mosaic of political parties that stretched from the Socialists and Communists on the left to the National Party on the right.<sup>2</sup> By the 1970 election of Salvador Allende, these political parties had cooperated relatively peacefully since the nineteen fifties, with presidents from different ideological backgrounds transitioning to power in succession. Although never electing a Marxist president during this time, the Communists and Socialists had a decent amount of political power, helping to elect both Carlos Ibáñez del Campo in 1952 and Eduardo Frei Montalva in 1964.

---

<sup>1</sup> David F. Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-1965* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 255,268.

<sup>2</sup> Julius Rivera, "Political Parties and the Politics of Development in Latin America," *Social Research* 36, no. 2 (1969): 296-298.

Chile entered center stage within U.S. foreign relations during the presidency of John F. Kennedy. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress worked to promote political and economic development in Latin America while tying their economies closer with that of the United States.<sup>3</sup> Before Kennedy's presidency the U.S. had held a checkered past with Latin American nations, especially within the context of the Cold War. Starting with the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the United States began to assert its diplomatic power in the hemisphere. At the height of European colonialism in the nineteenth century, the Monroe Doctrine provided a warning to European nations that further conquest and colonization in the hemisphere was unacceptable. Although not gaining much attention or use until after the Civil War, the Monroe Doctrine would come to revolutionize America's stance in the hemisphere and be utilized as a means of precedent to legitimize its power throughout the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> As Latin America became more appealing to American industrial and diplomatic ambitions, some diplomats and presidents would come to add corollaries to the Monroe Doctrine, expanding its power and scope.

After the Spanish American War of 1898, the United States began to use the language of the Monroe Doctrine as a mandate to meddle in its neighbor's affairs. As American economic and diplomatic power grew, new additions to the Monroe Doctrine's authority were used as a springboard from which to project American power. President Theodore Roosevelt's 1904 *Roosevelt Corollary* added the stipulation that America could intervene in the internal affairs of Latin American countries to mitigate debts owed to European powers.<sup>5</sup> This led to an intensely interventionalist period in Latin America throughout the first three decades of the twentieth

---

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos and Vietnam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002). 124.

<sup>4</sup> Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1994), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, 25-26.

century. By the nineteen thirties the United States had begun to opt for supporting right-wing military dictatorships in Latin America as a means of limiting direct engagement under the Roosevelt Corollary. By the time Franklin D. Roosevelt, Theodore's cousin, came to office in 1933, at least fifteen of the twenty Latin American republics were run by dictators.<sup>6</sup>

Through the lens of the Cold War and the ever-present threat of Marxist infiltration in Latin America, this support of right-wing military dictatorships continued after a period of non-intervention under the Roosevelt administration's "*Good Neighbor*" Policy.<sup>7</sup> The *Kennan Corollary* in 1950, the creation of American diplomat George F. Kennan, asserted that the United States should support strong dictatorships in Latin America to prevent their perpetually weak and chaotic governments from falling into the hands of communists.<sup>8</sup> This approach of realism over moralistic rhetoric signified a reversal of FDR's approach and the official solidification of the U.S.'s policy of supporting right-wing dictatorships in the region.

The first application of this policy came when President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorized Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) covert action in Guatemala in 1954 in the interest of the U.S. based corporation, the United Fruit Company, and to thwart a perceived communist threat in the country. Although CIA and State Department analysis showed that Guatemala was not a military or strategic threat, the Eisenhower administration saw Guatemala as an impediment to the perception of U.S. power in the world and to inter-American international cooperation. The United Fruit Company, whose stake in the country was significant, worked tirelessly to lobby the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations in favor of armed intervention,

---

<sup>6</sup> Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side*, 46-48.

<sup>7</sup> Schmitz, 127.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, 70-72.



as did the authoritarian leaders from nearby Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador.<sup>9</sup> American policy makers viewed the president of Guatemala, Jacobo Arbenz's land redistribution policies, which were popular among the rural poor, as being used to galvanize support and prepare the country for a communist revolution. These policies also worked to frighten Guatemala's landed elite and the country's largest landowner, United Fruit Company. After a shipment of Soviet-bloc military equipment, which was believed that Arbenz intended to use to facilitate an armed communist uprising was discovered by the Guatemalan military, the Eisenhower administration went forward with its covert operations plan, using CIA trained armed dissidents and psychological warfare to overthrow Arbenz's government.<sup>10</sup> For the Eisenhower administration this was a great victory and amounted to a show of strength against communist aggression and its growing presence around the globe. For Latin American governments, this was a signal that the U.S. had resumed its meddling in hemispheric affairs and an end to Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. This type of covert action against Latin American governments continued throughout the nineteen fifties and sixties, most notably during the failed overthrow of Fidel Castro's government during the Bay of Pigs incident under the Kennedy administration.<sup>11</sup>

In the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies a similar situation began to play out in Chile. Like Guatemala, the United States had significant corporate interests in the country, especially within the mining and telecommunications industries. The U.S. government was equally concerned with the socialist agenda of President Salvador Allende and the fact that his administration was the first democratically elected pro-Marxist government in the free world.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 141-146.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Henry Kissinger: White House Years*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1979), 653-654.

Yet despite these similarities to Guatemala, Chile had some marked differences. First, although contributing to most of the country's exports, copper mining companies did not have the same power or privilege held by companies like United Fruit in Guatemala. The American supported government of Allende's predecessor, President Eduardo Frei had negotiated the "Chileanization" of American owned copper mining companies in the country, which now gave a 51% share in those companies to the Chilean government.<sup>13</sup> The world had changed since the nineteen fifties and cases of intervention like Guatemala and the failed Bay of Pigs incident in Cuba, had put more pressure on the U.S.'s image and its ability to throw its weight around unchecked.

The threat of revolutionary Marxism itself had changed as well. Although Cuba remained a proverbial thorn in the side of the U.S., the relationship between the two major powers of the Cold War (the United States and Soviet Union) had pivoted greatly between the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations. With Nixon's realpolitik view of the world and efforts through détente, tensions between the two great powers had cooled significantly.<sup>14</sup> The Nixon administration aimed further to eventually incorporate the Soviet Union into the international system the United States had created. It also restarted relations with China in 1971, a huge step forward in the process of détente and normalizing relations with the communist world.<sup>15</sup> Although America's economic imperialism and fears of communism remained a force in their decision to support and actively garner a coup in Chile, the principal reason for American covert intervention in the country is more accurately understood as a means of maintaining political hegemony over the western hemisphere. Allende was a threat to U.S. interests because he was an unabashed Marxist,

---

<sup>13</sup> Albert L Michaels, "The Alliance for Progress and Chile's 'Revolution in Liberty,' 1964-1970," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 18, no. 1 (February 1976): 86.

<sup>14</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2019), 381-382.

<sup>15</sup> Westad, 405-409.

but he was more of a threat to U.S. interests and hegemony because he actively sought to diminish America's role in Chile and Latin America more generally.

The term hegemony itself is more useful than imperialism in the fact that it refers to power and influence on a broad scale.<sup>16</sup> There was no direct American empire in Latin America and no specific aims at territorial control. Instead, American leaders wished to promote a general powerbase throughout Latin America that promoted U.S. economic interests and helped to project its power within international political organizations. Friendly dictators were seen as a preferable conduit to this sort of setup over the shifting allegiances of democratically elected leaders, especially those who actively sought to diminish the U.S.'s role in the region.

This concept is further understood when considering the key players in the U.S. government's decision to facilitate the coup. As global political figures, Richard Nixon and perhaps more importantly his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, viewed the world through a realist political lens known as "realpolitik". Thomas A. Schwartz lays out a clear definition in his book, *Henry Kissinger and American Power*, "a foreign policy that eschewed moral considerations or democratic ideology and was geared to a "cold-blooded" promotion and protection of America's security and interests."<sup>17</sup> To them the goal was to promote U.S. global dominance through any means necessary, whether that meant supporting an authoritarian, democratic, or even Marxist regime. If the calculation was that the decision ultimately furthered U.S. global power, then this was the subsequent path taken. For Latin America, this meant a harkening back to the Kennan Corollary. To Kissinger and Nixon, Latin American governments were seen as messy and corrupt. With friendly dictators at the helm, the U.S. could push forth its

---

<sup>16</sup> Michael H. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 313.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas A. Schwartz, *Henry Kissinger and American Power* (New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 2020), 9.

international agenda and economics goals. Further, the control instituted by military dictatorships lessened the possibility of direct military intervention abroad by U.S. forces, something the American public warmly welcomed after the difficult years of the Vietnam War.<sup>18</sup>

Further adding fuel to the fire was the CIA and above it the National Security Council (NSC), which Kissinger served on and in many cases set the agenda. These organizations too, generally held a realist understanding of the world and global affairs. Within the context of the Chilean coup, the CIA can be understood as the facilitators of U.S. covert action. Although ranking members had connections to U.S. companies operating in Chile, especially those in telecommunications, the CIA kept active options open and only moved forward at the behest of the White House.<sup>19</sup> The State Department also played a significant role in Allende's downfall but generally held an ideological stance to support Chilean democracy and prevent Marxist subversion from altering Chile's path as laid out by the Kennedy administration through the Alliance for Progress. For this reason, the State Department was largely kept out of the planning for a military coup, known as "Track II," and yet remained a key player in "Track I" that strove to undermine Allende constitutionally and economically in the time before his confirmation.

Despite its strong record of democratic stability and general lack of military intervention in domestic affairs, Chile under President Salvador Allende was set on a collision course with American hegemonic power and an American presidential administration with the desire to maintain it. For Nixon and Kissinger, Allende's anti-American rhetoric became a rallying cry behind which American covert action and economic power was used to facilitate a coup, ending democracy in Chile for seventeen years and leading to the death and displacement of thousands

---

<sup>18</sup> Schmitz, 293.

<sup>19</sup> Morris Morley and Steven Smith, "Imperial 'Reach': U.S. Policy and the CIA in Chile," *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 5, no. 2 (1977): 203.

of Chileans. But the global order Nixon and Kissinger were trying to preserve became increasingly untenable the more they intervened in the internal politics of their Latin American neighbors. In many ways Kissinger's notion of what risk an Allende administration meant in his memorandum to Nixon on November 5, 1970, are correct.

“The election of Allende as President of Chile poses for us one of the most serious challenges ever faced in this hemisphere... [W]hat happens in Chile over the next six to twelve months will have ramifications that will go far beyond just US–Chile relations. They will have an effect on what happens in the rest of Latin America and the developing world; on what our future position will be in the hemisphere; and on the larger world picture.”<sup>20</sup>

But it was through the U.S. government's reaction to the election that it's “future position” was cemented. Instead of a solid bastion of support in Chile, the United States got an increasingly violent and unpredictable partner in Augusto Pinochet. Further, as greater understanding of U.S. involvement in incidents like the coup against Salvador Allende surfaced U.S. credibility in Latin America have suffered greatly. In large part, this has led to an end of unchallenged U.S. power in the hemisphere and a weakening of America's prominent position in the international community.

### Historiography

The historiography of United States involvement in the 1973 coup in Chile has a tidal nature of ebbs and flows. In the years directly following the coup and initial consolidation of the military dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet, a series of articles were published prodding into

---

<sup>20</sup>The White House, **SECRET/SENSITIVE** Memorandum for the President, “NSC Meeting, November 6–Chile, “November 5, 1970. Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 122.

the nature of the coup and the involvement and culpability of the United States. Relying heavily on the findings of Congressional hearings and reporting from American and international newspapers, these early articles seemed to scratch the surface U.S. involvement with little in the way of direct confirmation of this fact.

As the nineteen seventies wore on, a few articles surfaced implicating the United States in direct involvement and seemed to focus directly on the dictatorship of Pinochet itself.<sup>21</sup> After the publication of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's report (Church Committee) 1976, a brief flurry of new journal articles appeared but these articles did little more than confirm suspicions of CIA involvement in Chile and Nixon's economic campaign to isolate and destroy the Chilean economy under the Allende administration. In the larger view, they spark a debate over U.S. involvement in imperial pursuits more broadly. This interaction demonstrates a new political divide between understandings of America's history of intervention in the world separating liberals and conservatives. The most important writing from this period came from the memoirs of a man who was directly involved in U.S. efforts in Chile, Henry Kissinger.<sup>22</sup> Kissinger's memoirs represent the bulwark of literature downplaying U.S. involvement in Chile and work as a direct and unapologetic response to the Church Committee's report. These memoirs and the arguments present in them, became the standard historical stance of the U.S. government, and have largely remained so to this day.

During the transition from Pinochet's regime to the rebirth democracy in 1990, new insights into Chile's past and predictions of the future began to surface, but again these spoke little of U.S. involvement in the coup.<sup>23</sup> The easiest explanation for the limited scope of

---

<sup>21</sup> Peter Strafford, "Chile: Regime in Quandary," *The World Today* 31, no. 4 (April 1975): 154.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 653.

<sup>23</sup> Arturo Valenzuela and Pamela Constable, "Democracy in Chile," *Current History* 90, no. 553 (February 1991): 53-54.

secondary research on the subject is the fact that any documents concerning U.S. involvement were classified, preventing further inspection into American intelligence reports and governmental action. The last real declassification effort that had transpired up until this point was the release of the Church Committee's findings in 1976.<sup>24</sup> In the early nineteen nineties during the Clinton administration, an effort began to push the administration to finally declassify many of the documents and shed light on the realities of Chile's past and potential U.S. involvement.<sup>25</sup> Many of these cries came from the newly democratized Chile itself and the Chilean expatriate community living around the world.<sup>26</sup>

The post-Pinochet era coincided with the post-Soviet era. The early nineteen nineties through the present have represented a time of increased discussion over U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. Although Chile has remained only a slight fixture of analysis during this time, the commentary on U.S. policy toward Latin America and "the Third World" more generally, has come to represent a significant factor in any analysis of U.S. actions toward Chile and deserves recognition. Investigation into American reliance on "Friendly Tyrants" and the unfolding of the Monroe Doctrine help to further explain American actions toward Latin America.<sup>27</sup> The larger Cold War context allows for a more complete understanding of U.S. actions during the time, especially throughout the Nixon Administration. With the coming of the new millennium and a shift in focus of U.S. policy makers toward a post-Soviet world, new opportunities to demonstrate America's readiness to acknowledge its Cold War sins and move forward into a new global order began to surface.

---

<sup>24</sup> Frank Church, Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, April 29, 1976.

<sup>25</sup> "Exposing America's Role in Chile," *The New York Times*, October 6, 1999, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas C. Wright and Rody Oñate Zúñiga, "Chilean Political Exile," *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 4 (July 2007): 46.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Pipes and Adam M. Garfinkle, *Friendly Tyrants: An American Dilemma* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1991), 3.

In the final years of President Bill Clinton’s administration credence was paid to this notion after decades of silence from the U.S. government. Between 1999 and 2000 the Clinton administration declassified some 23,000 documents related to U.S. intelligence accounts of the coup in Chile and the successive dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Although sometimes heavily redacted, these documents breathed new life into inquiries about U.S. involvement in the 1973 coup. After a few years of analysis, the early 2000s and 2010s saw the emergence of new literature dedicated to the inspection of U.S. culpability for the coup. In tandem with this new wave of analysis, the *Chile Documentation Project* has sought to continue to unearth documents related to Chile’s coup and dictatorship, blowing open a new chapter in the period’s analysis.<sup>28</sup> This period has run alongside an effort to rewrite the current Chilean constitution which was originally written during the Pinochet regime. As a new era in Chilean politics begins to take shape, the implications of the past have never appeared more relevant.

The first real attempt at understanding the coup and the potential for U.S. involvement came in the immediate years after it occurred. At this point, the Pinochet regime had galvanized its control over the country, with the heaviest period of violence on behalf of the government coming to an end. Academics during this phase of the Chilean dictatorship tended to focus more on the reasons for the loss of control by the Allende government and the missteps of the left.<sup>29</sup> There was also a heavy focus on the tactics and atrocities of the Pinochet regime, although many of the exact figures were missing due to the clandestine nature of the government’s terror campaign. Discussions of U.S. involvement mostly focused on information reported by

---

<sup>28</sup> Kornbluh, xiv-xv.

Thomas Blanton, “The Chile Documentation Project,” The Chile Documentation Project | National Security Archive, accessed October 28, 2022, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/project/chile-documentation-project>.

<sup>29</sup> Laurence Whitehead, “Why Allende Fell,” *The World Today* 29, no. 11 (November 1973): 461-474.



American and international newspapers and had little evidence into America's direct involvement.

Two works, Kyle Steenland's, *The Coup in Chile* and Alan Angell's, *Chile One Year After the Coup* fit into this category.<sup>30</sup> Although these works admit that much of the evidence for U.S. involvement was "still not in yet", they outline potential probable cause on the part of the U.S. and spell out the known ways in which it had been involved up until that point.<sup>31</sup> Steenland keenly notices a disconnect between the State Department and Department of Treasury's (public facing institutions) intentions in Chile and those of the CIA and Naval Intelligence. This represents the bifurcated approach the Nixon Administration took to handling the Allende presidency. He also points to the economic blockade put in place by the U.S. through the auspices of National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and the National Security Council. Angell focusses on the monetary impact of U.S. involvement in Chile, including the creation of economic chaos ordered by Kissinger and the Committee of 40 and the support for "paramilitary organizations like the fascist *Patria y Libertad*" (Fatherland and Liberty) and the agreed payment by Pinochet of \$253 million from the Chilean government to the Anaconda Mining Corporation as a means of reparations from the company's expropriation under Allende's government.<sup>32</sup> Without much concrete evidence, these works draw stark conclusions about U.S. involvement, many of which were validated by later declassified documents.

After the Church Committee released its final report in 1976 a new debate over the impact of U.S. policy in Latin America ensued. The chief concern of this debate was to the nature of U.S. foreign policy and to what degree this policy could be understood as imperialistic,

---

<sup>30</sup> Kyle Steenland, "The Coup in Chile," *Latin American Perspectives* 1, no. 2 (1974): 9.

<sup>31</sup> Steenland, 20.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Angell, "Chile One Year after the Coup," *Current History* 68, no. 401 (January 1975): 12.

especially within the context of Latin America. Two articles published in the same year help to define the parameters of this debate and show the impact the Church Committee had on the American public. Jerome Slater's piece, *Is United States Foreign Policy "Imperialist" or "Imperial"?* and Abraham F. Lowenthal's *The United States and Latin America: Ending the Hegemonic Presumption*, function as the two key points of view following the Church Committee's findings.<sup>33</sup>

Slater's work describes the changing perspective of Americans over the country's foreign policy since the beginning of the post-war period. Initially, Slater argues, Americans looked at U.S. foreign policy as a defensive means to check Soviet imperialist ambitions that sometimes extended too far.<sup>34</sup> However, starting in the nineteen sixties, radicals and Marxists in America began to challenge this notion, viewing the U.S. as the greatest imperial power in the world, on par with the European colonial powers of the nineteenth century. Since then, Slater argues, this version of America as the true imperial force in the world has bled into the mainstream conversation and has been bolstered by recent events taken out of context.<sup>35</sup>

In stark response, Lowenthal points directly to the findings of the Church Committee as evidence of America's imperial ambitions, tracing the country's imperial project from the start of the twentieth century.<sup>36</sup> Lowenthal determines that it is this very imperial nature that has alienated the United States from Latin America and will continue to hamper relations between the two regions in the future. Eventually, Lowenthal points to the hopes of pan-Americanism to

---

<sup>33</sup> Abraham F. Lowenthal, "The United States and Latin America: Ending the Hegemonic Presumption," *Foreign Affairs* 55, no. 1 (October 1976): pp. 199-213, 199.

Jerome Slater, "Is United States Foreign Policy 'Imperialist' or 'Imperial'?", *Political Science Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (1976): pp. 63-87, 63.

<sup>34</sup> Slater, 64-65.

<sup>35</sup> Slater, 75-77.

<sup>36</sup> Lowenthal, 199.

bridge the divide created by the U.S. and build a future of mutual respect between the United States and Latin America.<sup>37</sup>

Although demonstrating the larger debate brought on by the revelations of the Church Committee these writers do little to deliver real insights into U.S. intervention in Chile. They function as political white noise and represent the continuing split of ideology and American self-image between conservatives and liberals in the country during the nineteen seventies.

With the official end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the promise of a global order led solely by the United States and the West, a new rush of literature began to emerge analyzing American and Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War. Although much of the early work during this period focused primarily on the global north, new analysis of U.S. policy toward Latin America emerged, giving context to American action in the region. Despite the issue of U.S. involvement in Chile's 1973 coup being stymied by lack of fresh material, new perspectives relating to U.S. involvement in the region provided greater context to the situation and novel lenses by which to analyze American foreign policy. As the release of documents by the Clinton administration shed new light on America's role in the Chilean coup, Cold War narratives too reflect the new findings of the Nixon administration's actions in Chile.

Gaddis Smith's 1994 book, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993*, demonstrates the complexities of American foreign policy in Latin America during the Cold War.<sup>38</sup> Smith argues that U.S. policy in the region during the Cold War should be understood as an extension of the Monroe Doctrine dating back to President Monroe's speech to Congress in 1823, and that by not considering the Monroe Doctrine, several other scholars of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War have missed a key blind spot.

---

<sup>37</sup> Lowenthal, 210-213.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine*, 3.

In promoting this thesis Smith points to three key themes of the book. First, that final years of the Monroe Doctrine are inseparable from the Cold War.<sup>39</sup> These two concepts ultimately merged linking U.S. strategic interest in the hemisphere under the Monroe Doctrine with the broader battle with the Soviets for global control and security. Secondly, that throughout this time U.S. officials knew little about Latin America and gave the region little respect within their analysis of global affairs and power structures.<sup>40</sup> This lack of respect led to intermittent periods of neglect and heavy-handed policy, often resulting in the use of force by the U.S. or the support for authoritarian regimes in the region. Finally, the modification of Monroe Doctrine principles to a Cold War approach based on secrecy, covert action, and the defiance of legal and constitutional restrictions on the conduct of foreign policy became the new norm.<sup>41</sup> Smith tracks the development and debate over the creation of the United Nations (UN) after World War II and the friction between the body's international sovereignty to intervene in conflicts and the U.S.'s control over Latin America through the precedent of the Monroe Doctrine. This leads to a preference of smaller regional organizations like the Organization of American States (OAS) in taking the lead on regional affairs before UN involvement. In this way, Smith discusses the concept of "hard" and "soft" spheres of influence in foreign relations. Smith says that "a hard sphere edges toward annexation and usually involves the direct use of military force and direct control of the political and economic life" of a country, whereas "a soft sphere involves no overt coercion... although it applies nonviolent pressure, offers positive inducements, and makes clear its preferences."<sup>42</sup> In Latin America the United States maintained both hard and soft spheres throughout the twentieth century.

---

<sup>39</sup> Smith, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, 8-9.

When discussing U.S. involvement in Chile, Smith points to both Johnson and Nixon's fears of "another Cuba" as well as U.S. strategic interests in copper as the main draws for American intervention. Although brief, Smith demonstrates his thesis in Chile as U.S. efforts to coax Chilean compliance with American hegemony and pressure on the Allende government as exerting both a hard and soft sphere over the country. Despite Smith's admission that it was inconclusive if the U.S. was directly involved in the 1973 coup because "the evidence is not all in", he does point to the Chilean situation as "inflictin[ing] deep and lasting wounds on the principles of the Monroe Doctrine."<sup>43</sup> This sense of uncertainty springing from the tension between the Church Committee's findings and Kissinger's response to them in his memoirs which muddied the discourse on the subject.

In continuing the analysis of U.S. policy during the twentieth century, David F. Schmitz's, *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-1965*, discusses the preference of American policy makers in choosing to support right-wing dictatorships in foreign countries instead of promoting democratic governments.<sup>44</sup> For Schmitz, much like Smith, one of the reasons for U.S. support for dictators, especially in the case of Latin America, was policymakers' lack of knowledge and respect for the region. Through the buildup of the Cold War and the geopolitical power struggle that ensued, the United States began to look evermore at "friendly dictators" to sure up anti-communist support, create a stable international climate, and ensure that American economic and foreign policy objectives were met. As Schmitz describes it, "[t]his lesser-of-two-evils approach to foreign policy, supported by oversimplified bipolar worldviews and influence by racism...led the United States to support and align itself

---

<sup>43</sup> Smith, 136-137.

<sup>44</sup> Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side*, 4.

with many of the most brutal regimes in the world.”<sup>45</sup> Despite America’s fight against Nazi and Italian fascism in World War II and the rhetoric that accompanied, Schmitz argues that the short term stability provided by friendly dictators provided too strong and simple of a solution to larger international issues to pass up.

In the epilogue Schmitz discusses how the specter of the Vietnam War and its impact on the American consciousness, in large part changed how the U.S. approached the subject of friendly dictators. Schmitz highlights the major case that cuts against this narrative however in Pinochet’s Chile. Schmitz points to the fear of communism as the main factor in the U.S. approach to Chile and pays specific attention to the ways the Church Committee’s findings impacted the American consciousness on friendly dictators in the aftermath of the coup.<sup>46</sup> Chile is used as a case study to signify the turning point in American foreign policy and its decision to support right-wing authoritarianism, however, does not ultimately signify its end.

The most influential and encompassing work of the post declassification era comes from Peter Kornbluh, the director of the Chile Documentation Project at the National Security Archive.<sup>47</sup> Originally published in 2003, Kornbluh’s book *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*, takes a deep dive into the national security documents declassified by the Clinton administration.<sup>48</sup> Told chronologically from the lead up to Allende’s election in 1970 until the final days of the Pinochet dictatorship and containing several of the most important declassified documents directly printed in the book, Kornbluh lays out U.S. effort through the Nixon administration and CIA to first block President Allende’s confirmation by the

---

<sup>45</sup> Schmitz, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Schmitz, 294-300.

<sup>47</sup> The Chile Documents project is part of a larger declassification effort through the National Security Archive. A non-profit dedicated to investigating government secrecy through declassification and investigative journalism. Primary source documents and analysis can be found at [www.nsarchive.gwu.edu](http://www.nsarchive.gwu.edu)

<sup>48</sup> Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2013), xvii.

Chilean legislature and later facilitate his ousting by members of the Chilean armed forces. The book continues by describing the Nixon and later Ford administrations' embrace of Augusto Pinochet and the turbulent events that led to his ousting in a 1988 plebiscite.

The narrative structure of *The Pinochet Files* revolves directly around the declassified documents introducing and analyzing them chronologically to “revisit the complex and controversial history of U.S. policy toward democracy and dictatorship in Chile,” and provide a base of material by which people can judge the actions of the U.S. government toward Chilean democracy and human rights.<sup>49</sup>

The book begins with a retelling of a White House meeting between President Richard Nixon, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, Attorney General John Mitchell, and CIA Director Richard Helm in response to the election of Salvador Allende. In it, Nixon gives the green light for active U.S. involvement in preventing Allende's confirmation as president. Revolving around the notes taken by CIA Director Helm, the order which will later become known as Project FUBELT is given.<sup>50</sup> Kornbluh traces the development of Tracks I and II of FUBELT which both aim to prevent an Allende presidency but with varying levels of constitutionality.

The book describes documents showing the concerted effort by the Nixon administration to curry favor with top military officials and to push for their removal if they demurred from the anti-Allende and UP stance held by the U.S. as demonstrated by its support for kidnapping of constitutionalist head of the military, General René Schneider which resulted in his assassination.<sup>51</sup> After this, the Nixon administration hoping to distance itself from the

---

<sup>49</sup> Kornbluh, xvii-xviii.

<sup>50</sup> Kornbluh, 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Kornbluh, 22-29.

assassination pushed for an economic destabilization plan while continuing to engage with military leaders and supporting rightwing propaganda and paramilitary groups to create “coup conditions” and a “formula for chaos” under Allende.<sup>52</sup>

The documents and analysis presented by Kornbluh help to undermine the narrative put forth by Henry Kissinger in his memoirs. He draws clear distinctions between the campaign support mission of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and the anti-democratic coup promotion of the Nixon administration. He also shows clear acknowledgement from several U.S. officials of the dangers to Chilean democracy and its people that meddling under the Nixon administration would cause. Kornbluh’s work is a strong start to reversing the Kissinger narrative of events through declassified documents and provides a clear base of work to build later analysis from. In this way it achieves its stated objectives by being a source of information through which the public can accurately judge the actions of the U.S. government toward Chile in the lead up to and fallout from the coup in 1973.

With the analysis laid out by Kornbluh, new works began considering the evidence of U.S. involvement in Chile in a new way. Michel Grow’s 2008 book, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War*, lays out a similar argument as its predecessors in U.S. fears of a communist incursion in South America.<sup>53</sup> Relying heavily on secondary sources, including Kornbluh’s work, Grow makes two key additions to the general Chilean narrative. First, that Kissinger and others feared Chile because it was a democratically elected Marxist government and that this would provide an example for other Latin American countries to legitimize anti-American governments.<sup>54</sup> The second, that although principally

---

<sup>52</sup> Kornbluh, 29-35, 79-115.

<sup>53</sup> Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American*, 93.

<sup>54</sup> Grow, 108.



concerned with the foreign policy implications of a successful Allende presidency, Nixon's domestic agenda and run for the presidency could be derailed as a communist Chile that could be seen as another, potentially worse Cuba.<sup>55</sup> For Grow, these two factors greatly contributed to Nixon and Kissinger's fears over Allende and forced them to use covert force to enact his downfall.

Focusing back on U.S. policy toward Chile specifically, Lubna Z. Qureshi's 2009, *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende* provides further evidence for U.S. involvement in the coup and attempts to understand the reason for Nixon and Kissinger's stance on Chile and Latin America in general.<sup>56</sup> Qureshi continuously points to Nixon and Kissinger's lack of understanding of Latin America and general distaste for the region as a major player in why the Nixon administration took such a hard line against the Allende administration.<sup>57</sup> She also points to the influence of major U.S. corporations operating in Chile, such as Anaconda, Pepsi, and ITT (International Telephone & Telegraph) and their connections with the Nixon administration.<sup>58</sup> She continues by describing Nixon's fears of a more dangerous Cuba in Chile through an electoral rather than revolutionary victory for socialism and anti-American hegemony. Her deep dive into primary and the secondary literature helps to draw distinctions between what Nixon and Kissinger both say in their memoirs and realities of their actions found through the recorded source material.

The literature revolving around the 1973 Chilean coup and the United States government's involvement in it is heavily weighted toward the investigations over the past twenty years. With the declassification effort of the Clinton administration and the successive

---

<sup>55</sup> Grow, 109-110.

<sup>56</sup> Lubna Z. Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), xi-xiii.

<sup>57</sup> Qureshi, 1-4.

<sup>58</sup> Qureshi, 50-51, 67-71.

movement to publicize and interpret those documents by organizations like the National Security Archive and others, a clearer picture is forming of American culpability in the overthrow of Salvador Allende. With such a short amount of time to consider the information at hand there has been little push against the growing consensus of U.S. involvement.

### Kissinger and Nixon: The Official Line on U.S. Involvement in the Chilean Coup

The memoirs of Henry Kissinger provide the most articulate and stalwart defense of U.S. involvement in Chile and effectively work to undermine much of the reaction to the Church Committee's findings. Published between 1979 and 1999 and encompassing three volumes, totaling almost 4000 pages, Kissinger's memoirs contain two chapters dedicated to Chile. In his first book, *White House Years*, Kissinger outlines the election of Salvador Allende to the presidency and the response of the Nixon administration.<sup>59</sup> Throughout the chapter, Kissinger provides context to the Chile situation within the scope of the Nixon administration's larger global approach and the key events and crises taking place around the world.

Kissinger also lays out three principles that underscore U.S. involvement during the election and prior to Allende's confirmation, while downplaying U.S. actions and establishing plausible deniability toward the findings of the Church Committee. First, the Nixon administration was following the blueprint laid out by the two previous (Kennedy and Johnson) administrations. He points to covert action pursued by both administrations to influence election outcomes and the anti-communist reaction to Allende's election by Edward Korry (the Kennedy appointed Ambassador to Chile) as evidence. Secondly, that Allende's presidency represented a serious threat to U.S. interests because it would "[make] common cause with Cuba, and sooner

---

<sup>59</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 653-654.

or later [establish] close relations with the Soviet Union.”<sup>60</sup> This would ultimately lead to the strengthening of international communism and threaten American economic and security interests in the hemisphere. And finally, Kissinger claims that Salvador Allende was an authoritarian wolf in democratic sheep’s clothing, and that the Nixon administration was attempting to save Chile from the clutches of a leftwing dictator, the equivalent to a continental Castro.

To bolster his first claim, Kissinger cites several memoranda from U.S. Ambassador to Chile, Edward Korry. In these memoranda, Korry plays up the fears of a communist takeover in Chile and its larger implications for Latin America.<sup>61</sup> Kissinger further claims ignorance to U.S. Latin American policy and therefore relied heavily on the expertise of American diplomats in the region. A point he later laments, not for its assessment of the threat of communism in Chile but for the lack of a proper assessment to the severity of the situation that could have led to an earlier and less costly U.S. response.

For the second and third claims he relies on heavily selective quotes from Allende’s party coalition’s (UP) platform and from published interviews between President Allende and French philosopher and Marxist, Régis Debray.<sup>62</sup> Although the interviews do hash out Allende’s Marxist philosophical credentials, they also show Kissinger’s quotation selections to be largely out of context. After citing the text, Kissinger begins to refer to Allende throughout the book as a totalitarian Marxist-Leninist<sup>63</sup>, however the interview shows that Allende’s Marxist aims for Chile as being aspirational, hoping the people would take on the mantle of socialism themselves,

---

<sup>60</sup> Kissinger, 654.

<sup>61</sup> Kissinger, 653-657, 672-678.

<sup>62</sup> Debray Régis and Allende Salvador Gossens, *The Chilean Revolution: Conversations with Allende* (New York, NY: Random House, 1971).

<sup>63</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 657.

and that he was dedicated to democratic governance in the country.<sup>64</sup> Still, Kissinger persists with his analysis, tempering his rhetoric with a first-person account of the intelligence being received and decisions being made by the White House regarding the developing situation in Chile. He categorically denies any U.S. involvement in the plot to kidnap the Chilean military's Commander in Chief René Schneider, which led to his murder. Kissinger also downplays U.S. efforts to interfere in Allende's presidential confirmation process, pointing to many of the findings of the Church committee as proverbial smoke with little fire. Operation FUBELT (Track I & II) as it later is revealed to be called, is presented as normal clandestine operation on par with those of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Kissinger suggests these operations had been dramatized and like the rest of the U.S. response to Allende's presidency had been portrayed incorrectly.

In the second book of Kissinger's memoirs, *Years of Upheaval*, Kissinger continues his defense and downplays U.S. actions in Chile leading up to the coup. From the beginning, Kissinger claims, "Chile was not a major preoccupation of the American government after Allende was installed as President."<sup>65</sup> Yet shortly after, he also claims that Allende's government was a serious political challenge. He frets that "[i]f Chile had followed the Cuban pattern, Communist ideology would in time have been supported by Soviet forces and Soviet arms in the southern cone of the South American continent."<sup>66</sup> Throughout the chapter, Kissinger works to at once downplay the threat Allende posed and the U.S. governments attitudes and actions toward it, while simultaneously playing up the threat a successful Allende administration and what it would mean to American physical security and geopolitical power. These two irreconcilable

---

<sup>64</sup> Debray, *The Chilean Revolution*, 116-117.

<sup>65</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Henry Kissinger: Years of Upheaval*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1982), 374.

<sup>66</sup> Kissinger, 376.

stances are mitigated by the claim that the principal reason Allende's government fell was because of its own strategic miscalculations and doomed government programs.

Kissinger creates plausible deniability in his tracking of meetings of the 40 committee (the top committee that oversees clandestine U.S. action) and claims little to nothing was done by this committee to bring about the end of the Allende government. He points to the crises of Vietnam and Watergate as diverting the administration's attention and therefore distracting them from the events transpiring in Chile.<sup>67</sup> Further, he points to figures of continuing U.S. aid, especially humanitarian aid during the upheaval caused by Allende's socialist programs to show America's continued benevolent stance in the region.<sup>68</sup>

Through his memoirs Kissinger greatly played down the role of the United States in Chile's 1973 coup and created a narrative that remained relatively solid and unchallenged for roughly twenty years. Playing down the revelations of the Church Committee and the reaction that came from it, Kissinger sidestepped many of its seemingly most damning claims. This narrative further asserts the validity of the Nixon administration's fears and apprehensions regarding the Allende presidency and furthers the acceptability of the Nixon and Ford administrations to embrace the violent dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

These same sentiments are reflected in the memoir of President Richard Nixon.<sup>69</sup> Although much briefer, Nixon's assessment of his administration's reaction to Allende's presidency and downfall hold to the same line. He begins his six-paragraph analysis, "In Chile's presidential elections of September 4, 1970, a pro-Castro Marxist, Salvador Allende, came in first with a 36.3 percent plurality". He continues later, "[K]nowing that nearly two-thirds of

---

<sup>67</sup> Kissinger, 411.

<sup>68</sup> Kissinger, 391.

<sup>69</sup> Richard M Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 490.

Chile's voters had rejected Allende, I directed the CIA to provide support for Allende's opponents in order to prevent his election by the Chilean Congress."<sup>70</sup> Nixon justifies this action by claiming he was countering Soviet and Cuban efforts to support Allende and that once the CIA reported U.S. support was not going to work, he instructed the CIA to stop the operation. He finally points to Allende's inefficient government as the cause of his downfall.

Between these two renderings of the Nixon administration's role in the 1973 coup in Chile, the case was closed on the subject for roughly thirty years. Through the work of writers like Kornbluh and Qureshi these claims have been largely discredited. Yet despite the declassification efforts of the past two decades, to some degree Kissinger and Nixon's narrative continues to prevail. The following section lays out the argument for U.S. involvement and provides the timeline of U.S. intervention in Chile beginning with the Kennedy administration.

#### U.S. Intervention in Chile: From Kennedy to Nixon

Covert action in Chile largely began under the Kennedy Administration but was limited to election meddling including intelligence gathering on the Chilean electorate known as *Project Camelot* and covert funding of U.S. approved politicians.<sup>71</sup> These operations were largely led by the State Department with assistance from the CIA. The idea was to support centrist candidates with pro-U.S. leanings who would focus on gradual reforms and could strengthen the country economically and politically. This program was continued and, in some ways, amplified by the Johnson Administration. Yet, U.S. intervention in Chile was still focused on the influence of elections not on installing a military regime in the country.

---

<sup>70</sup> Nixon, 489.

<sup>71</sup>Gabriel Garcia Marquez, "*Chile, The Coup and The Gringos*," Berkeley Bard, April 4, 1975, pp. 12-13.

The landslide presidential election victory of Eduardo Frei in 1964 signaled the success of the U.S. policy toward Chile and the power of covert electioneering intervention. In a three-way race Frei had received an overwhelming 57 percent majority.<sup>72</sup> Frei, a center-left Christian Democrat, represented the exact kind of candidates the Alliance for Progress hoped to promote. His subsequent political agenda worked on tangible reforms for the Chilean people while holding with the American led neoliberal model for economic development. The Johnson administration declared Frei's victory "a showcase for the Alliance for Progress." Immediately following the victory, Chile became Latin America's largest beneficiary of U.S. aid. "Between 1962 and 1970, this country of only ten million people received over 1.2 billion dollars in economic grants and loans—an astronomical amount for the era."<sup>73</sup>

Yet, as Frei's time in office wore on, new economic problems began to impact the direction of Chilean politics and policy. Companies like Anaconda and Kennecott had reaped huge profits mining Chile's rich copper fields while providing little to the country directly. In response to pressure from the left, Frei began implementing a plan of "*Chileanization*" of the mining companies. This meant that the companies could continue to operate within the country but would need to be at least 51% owned by the government of Chile to ensure that the profits from Chile's natural resources would benefit the Chilean people.<sup>74</sup> Although this was not in line with the neoliberal reforms suggested by the U.S., the Nixon Administration agreed to the deal with little dissent. The administration understood that Frei was trying to thread the needle between what the Chilean people and the U.S. government desired and that by meeting him halfway, they would be strengthening his ability to continue to hold office. In a letter from Nixon

---

<sup>72</sup> David R Sands, "Chile Under Frei: The Alliance for Progress," *The Fletcher Forum*, 1982, pp. 33-60, 34.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Michaels, *The Alliance for Progress*, 86.

to Frei in May 1969, Nixon laid out his thoughts on the subject, “I know that, given the complex and technical nature of the economics of the copper industry, careful and patient study will be given by all sides to the problem. I share your hope that it will be possible to reach mutually satisfactory arrangements.”<sup>75</sup>

The change in direction by the U.S. under Nixon began with the congressional elections of 1969. Attempting to bolster Frei’s political coalition, the State Department and CIA went to work attempting to identify and support pro-Frei centrist candidates, yet among the potential 180 seats up for grabs, the CIA only identified 12, 10 of whom were successful in their bid. A memorandum from the 303 committee of the National Security Council (NSC) concluded that the operation was successful at achieving moderate goals, however, the overall landscape had only become more polarized with the conservative right and Marxist left as the biggest winners. The Communist-Socialist front now stood an even chance of presidential victory, especially in a three-way race. If Frei and his people wished to win, they had to turn the economy around and do it quickly.<sup>76</sup> The prolonged economic malaise of the Sixties and Seventies began to shift support toward the leftists who pointed to U.S. imperialism as a main cause of Chile’s economic woes. An intelligence briefing published by the CIA in January of 1968 reported “Over the past four years the administration of Eduardo Frei has been endeavoring to carry out a social, economic, and political revolution by peaceful, constitutional means. He has made considerable progress in some important fields, but in others has fallen far short of his goals.” The document pointed to economic stagnation and rapid inflation as the biggest challenges to Frei’s administration.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Letter From President Nixon to Chilean President Frei. Washington, May 21, 1969, Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976, Volume XXI, Chile, 1969–1973, (Washington: GPO, 2010), 41-42. [hereinafter cited a FRUS with volume number]

<sup>76</sup> Memorandum for the 303 Committee - SUBJECT Final Report: March 1969 Chilean Congressional Election. Washington, March 14, 1969, FRUS 1969–1976, Volume XXI, Chile, 1969–1973, 5-10.

<sup>77</sup> National Intelligence Estimate - NIE 94–69. Washington, January 28, 1969, FRUS 1969–1976, Volume XXI, Chile, 1969–1973, 1-3.



Sensing the sea change, Nixon, Kissinger, and the CIA began to work out contingency plans for a possible Allende victory in the 1970 presidential election. Although the State Department lobbied for continued election tampering and a rebuilding of the Christian Democratic Party with an eye on the 1976 election, Kissinger and CIA director Richard Helm began to push for a potential coup to prevent Allende's victory and ascension to the presidency. This idea was countered by several high-ranking officials from multiple branches of the government including: the American Ambassador to Chile, Edward Korry; CIA Chief of Station in Santiago, Henry Hecksher; and Kissinger's top aid on Latin America, Viron Vaky. All three of these men argued that a U.S. sponsored coup would backfire and if U.S. involvement were discovered, would irreversibly harm the perception of the U.S. in the world. This diminishment of standing would be far more harmful to U.S. credibility than an Allende presidency. All three men compared the potential fallout to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba.<sup>78</sup> Despite the multifront lobbying, Allende's narrow victory on September 4, 1970, sent shockwaves through America's security services and policy makers, signaling to Nixon that decisive action needed to be taken. In a secret White House memorandum, he made his thoughts clear. "Our main concern in Chile is the prospect that he [Allende] can consolidate himself and the picture projected on the world will be his success. No impression should be permitted in Latin America that they can get away with this, that it's safe to go this way. We cannot fail to show our displeasure"<sup>79</sup>

In response to Allende's victory a covert plan was devised known as "Project FUBELT". The operation was composed of two options depending on which opportunities presented themselves. Track I was similar to the basic covert electioneering that the government had

---

<sup>78</sup>Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 10-11.

<sup>79</sup>The White House, **SECRET/SENSITIVE** Memorandum of Conversation, "NSC Meeting—Chile (NSSM 97), November 6, 1970, Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 113-120.

previously taken part in, however it included the bribing of members of the Chilean Congress to ratify the runner-up candidate Jorge Alessandri, “he would then renounce the presidency and initiate new elections in which the outgoing Christian Democrat president Eduardo Frei could run again, and presumably defeat Allende.”<sup>80</sup> As time progressed, Track I would evolve with the ever-changing political situation. Realizing that bribery would be too risky, the CIA changed tactics so that Alessandri would create a military cabinet and resign, the military cabinet would thereby oversee a new election between Frei and Allende. The greatest deterrent of Track I was Frei’s unwillingness to push against the constitutional transfer of power. The CIA then began to pursue a false media campaign to plant articles that would significantly scare Frei into partaking in the coup plan. Track I was the official top-secret plan shared with multiple departments within the U.S. government.<sup>81</sup> The State Department was an essential part of Track I planning, which was the only plan it knew existed.

Track II was a much more closely guarded plan that remained limited to the White House, top CIA officials, and only some of the 40 Committee, (the covert action approval group formally known as the 303 committee) and NSC. Track II outlined the potential for a U.S. incited coup against the Allende administration, with several ways in which to pull in support from the armed forces to prevent Allende from taking power. The main difference between Track I and Track II was the choice of leader. Track I was designed to maintain the civilian led government under Frei, whereas Track II actively sought current or retired military leaders to take over the role of executive, potentially ending the democratic system Chile had maintained for decades. The main difficulty with Track II was like that of Track I. The majority of the most eligible of Chile’s military leaders remained apolitical and wished to uphold their constitutional

---

<sup>80</sup>Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> Kornbluh, 14-15.

duties toward whatever political coalition took power. This was particularly demonstrated by the head of the Chilean armed forces René Schneider.<sup>82</sup> With the difficulty created by the military's unwillingness to potentially support a coup attempt, the principal objective of Track II became creating the optimal conditions by which the military would be willing to support a coup. This included the removal of certain constitutionalist generals and polarization of Chile's political situation in a way that would warrant military intervention.

The CIA at the behest of the White House began a full campaign to probe current and retired military leaders, to increase interest in support for Track II. At the same time, they began a propaganda campaign designed to foster a "coup climate" in Chile. Among the first contacts was retired general Roberto Viaux, who was forced out of the military after a failed attempted coup against Frei in 1969.<sup>83</sup> During this time the U.S. also increased its pressure on the Chilean economy. With the help of U.S. businesses in Chile, including telecommunications and banking the CIA hoped to cut off governmental funding and bring down the Chilean economy to further instigate "proper coup conditions". Although largely redacted from declassified CIA documents, the CIA also used far-right groups in the country to commit acts of terror to bring retaliation from the leftists, further inciting military intervention.<sup>84</sup> With the elements for a coup taking shape, Santiago CIA Station Chief Henry Hecksher suggested in a top-secret cable, that a coup would cause a split in the armed forces that would lead to "considerable and prolonged" carnage, "i.e. civil war". Hecksher concluded his cable with, "You have asked us to provoke chaos in

---

<sup>82</sup> Kornbluh, 12-15.

<sup>83</sup> CIA, **SECRET** Memorandum, "Genesis of Project FUBELT, September 16, 1970. *Pinochet File*, Kornbluh, 37-44.

<sup>84</sup> Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 20.

Chile. Thru Viaux solution, we provide you with formula for chaos which is unlikely to be bloodless.”<sup>85</sup>

Once the Viaux plan was underway, the situation began to take a new shape. The CIA for its part, attempted to contact Viaux and his men while Viaux continued to devise his own plans. The plot became more and more a product of the Chilean conspirators as the CIA worked diligently to maintain plausible deniability if the coup was to be discovered. To strengthen Viaux’s hand a plan was hatched to remove the constitutionalist head of the military, Rene Schneider from power through kidnapping. During this time the CIA continued to measure the plausibility of the coup’s success. As Viaux’s plans to kidnap Schneider failed twice the CIA began to shift its position on the Viaux coup. A CIA postmortem briefing on Track II noted, “It became clear that Viaux did not have the organization or support to carry out a successful coup but might trigger prematurely an action that would spoil the better chances of doing so from within the active military itself.”<sup>86</sup> By October 15, 1970 Kissinger and Nixon were in full reverse, hoping to preserve the assets they had in the country for a later attempt. Yet as the CIA met with the Viaux group on October 18 to “defuse” the situation, plans for a full-blown coup were underway under the leadership of General Valenzuela, Admiral Tirado, and retired General Viaux. On the group's third attempt to kidnap Schneider during his daily commute, the kidnapping team botched the job, ultimately killing Schneider in the process.<sup>87</sup>

The response to the incident in Chile was the overwhelming ratification of Salvador Allende as president on October 24, 1970. The CIA for its part, began rapidly trying to cover their tracks and distance themselves from the assassination of General Schneider. Although

---

<sup>85</sup> Henry Hecksher, CIA Chief of Station in Santiago to Headquarters, “[Viaux Solution],” October 10, 1970, Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 22.

<sup>86</sup>Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 24.

<sup>87</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 676.

Project FUBELT had been a failure, Nixon continued to push for ways to undermine and ultimately end Allende's presidency early.<sup>88</sup> With the CIA able to successfully hide its involvement in the affair, new plans began being hatched that were built on the back of contacts established under Project FUBELT. These plans were not without controversy. Seeing Allende as the legitimately elected leader of the country, the State Department began to push for an acceptance of Allende's administration.<sup>89</sup> Henry Kissinger however, successfully lobbied the president to continue the operation. The CIA was relieved to be dealing with a situation with a much larger timeframe than Project FUBELT, which was limited to the less than the two months between Allende's election and ratification. To continue its distance from the Schneider assassination, the Nixon administration took a posture toward Chile that the president deemed "cool but correct."<sup>90</sup> Through this posture, the U.S. would appear to be working with the Chilean government while in the background it was actively trying to undermine the Allende administration and ultimately lead to its ousting.

A key component to the new strategy toward Chile was what became known as the "invisible blockade." Using the American corporations in the country, U.S. banking power, and international banking ties, the Nixon administration worked to cut the Chilean government off from all sources of foreign financial assistance.<sup>91</sup> As the U.S. government quietly worked to undermine Chile's economy, the CIA through the media outlets it controlled in Chile and around the world began pointing to Chile's worsening economic situation as proof positive that Allende's socialist agenda was failing the country. The only aspect of the Chilean government

---

<sup>88</sup> Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende*, 85.

<sup>89</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 678.

<sup>90</sup> National Security Council, **TOP SECRET** National Security Decision Memorandum 93, "Policy Toward Chile," November 9, 1970, Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 129-131.

<sup>91</sup> Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 83.

that continued to receive aid from the U.S. was the Chilean military, which saw military sales and assistance more than triple between 1970 and 1973.<sup>92</sup> In a secret memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon in 1970, Kissinger wrote “With regards to the Chilean military we are maintaining our military mission on a ‘business as usual’ basis, in order to maintain maximum contacts with the Chilean military.”<sup>93</sup>

Kissinger further laid out the CIA’s plan for Chile in a SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY memorandum to Nixon. The “five principal elements of the Cover Action Plan–Chile:”

1. Political action to divide and weaken the Allende coalition.
2. Maintaining and enlarging contacts in the Chilean military.
3. Providing support to non-Marxist opposition political groups and parties.
4. Assisting certain periodicals and using other media outlets in Chile which can speak out against the Allende government.
5. Using selected media outlets [in Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere] to play up Allende’s subversion of the democratic process and involvement by Cuba and the Soviet Union in Chile<sup>94</sup>

Through this plan, the U.S. government covertly spent millions of dollars on media-based misinformation and political campaigns, especially those of the Christian Democrats. The most significant spending on media was the CIA’s funding of the rightwing newspaper *El Mercurio*. When the CIA got involved with the paper, it was on the verge of bankruptcy. The CIA played on this, having the paper falsely claim that the Allende administration had actively worked to put it out of business to silence Allende’s critics. The CIA then funded the paper with millions of

---

<sup>92</sup> Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 85.

<sup>93</sup> Henry Kissinger, “Status Report on Chile,” ca. November 9, 1970, p. 4. Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 85.

<sup>94</sup> National Security Council, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, **SECRET/ SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY** “Covert Action Program–Chile,” November 25, 1970. Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 133.

dollars, many of which were funneled through the American based telecommunications company International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT). *El Mercurio* became the CIA's main line into the Chilean media space and helped to facilitate false information, much of which was directed at the military to garner further support for an eventual coup. Despite having significant voice within the Chilean media both Henry Kissinger and Salvador Allende complained of being disadvantaged by the Chilean media market.<sup>95</sup> The existence of a diverse media culture in Chile made mass political messaging difficult. To this end, both sides worked tirelessly to sculpt the national narrative, leading to greater political polarization in the media space throughout Allende's presidency.

ITT itself became an essential tool of the covert CIA anti-Allende campaign. Throughout the Allende election, ITT had plotted with the CIA and secretly funded the campaign of Allende's opponent Jorge Alessandri. The company had also conspired to assist in triggering the coup against Allende before his confirmation as president. On March 21, 1972, the *Washington Post* broke a story by columnist Jack Anderson that leaked many of these details. Anderson drew his story from "secret documents which escaped shredding by International Telephone and Telegraph."<sup>96</sup> The article caused a huge backlash against the U.S. in Chile and resulted in Allende and the Chilean Congress expropriating ITT outright. The article also had huge implications in the U.S. Congress. At the behest of the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, William Fulbright, the Senate created the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (Church Committee), led by Senator Frank Church. This would lead to a significant investigation

---

<sup>95</sup> Debray, *Chilean Revolution*, 113.  
Kissinger, *White House Years*, 659.

<sup>96</sup> Jack Anderson, "Memos Bare ITT Try for Chile Coup," in the *Washington Post*, March 21, 1972, B13.

into U.S. covert operations in Chile and be the catalyst for much of the early information about the U.S. government's involvement in the eventual coup against Salvador Allende.

Despite the negative attention brought by Anderson's article, the White House and CIA continued their plan to subvert Allende's presidency. Their next target was the congressional elections in March 1973. Here they hoped to gain a two-thirds majority opposition to trigger the impeachment of Allende. Instead, largely due to the revelations from Anderson's article the *Unidad Popular* coalition gained seats giving it control of 43.4 percent of congressional seats with the opposition holding 54.7 percent.<sup>97</sup> This loss forced the CIA to focus once again on creating strong "coup conditions" in Chile. The CIA began giving significant support to Chilean rightwing terrorist groups like *Patria y Libertad* and the "military elements of the National Party" to further polarize and destabilize the country. The plan largely worked, prompting an attempt by elements of the Chilean military to overthrow the government.<sup>98</sup> The attempted coup of June 29, 1973, ultimately failed but is largely considered a dress rehearsal for the successful coup on September 11, 1973.

After the failed June coup, events began to transpire rapidly. The UP began to fracture along moderate (favored by Allende) and hard liner leftist lines. A truck driver strike in July brought the economy to a halt as truck drivers were essential to moving much needed goods around the country.<sup>99</sup> In late August the constitutionalist Commander in Chief of the Chilean armed forces, Carlos Prats stepped down. It is thought that a smear campaign by the CIA funded *El Mercurio* ultimately led to Prats's resignation. General Augusto Pinochet came to replace Prats

---

<sup>97</sup> Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 105.

<sup>98</sup> National Security Council, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, **SECRET**, Situation Room, "Attempted Chilean Rebellion End," June 29, 1973, Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 151.

<sup>99</sup> Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 110-111.



as Commander in Chief.<sup>100</sup> Finally, on September 11, 1973, all three branches of the Chilean military led a bloody coup that resulted in the death and ousting of President Salvador Allende and the 17-year dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Nixon and Kissinger had won, Chilean democracy was finished, and ten days after the coup Henry Kissinger became U.S. Secretary of State.<sup>101</sup>

Although the facts of the coup remain largely uncontested, the reasons for U.S. involvement in the overthrow of Chilean democracy remain unresolved. The official stance of the United States State Department's Historians is that the U.S. was attempting to prevent the Marxist takeover of Chile.<sup>102</sup> Others have suggested that U.S. owned multinational corporations' fear of expropriation by Allende were a key component.<sup>103</sup> Although both arguments have some legitimate claim to why the U.S. intervened, the principal reason was the desire by Nixon, Kissinger, and top-ranking members of the CIA and NSC to protect U.S. hegemony in Latin America and prevent the rise of a South American leader that would challenge that hegemony.

#### Reasons for U.S. Involvement in the Allende Coup

To first understand the Nixon administration's reasons for intervening in Chile, it is important to understand the context of the two most important figures in the Nixon administration's thoughts and interactions with Latin America. Both Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger not only knew little about the region, but they also reviled it. For Nixon this distaste for Latin America likely began during his first trip to the region as Vice President under Dwight

---

<sup>100</sup> Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende*, 127-128.

<sup>101</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 431.

<sup>102</sup> "The Allende Years and the Pinochet Coup, 1969–1973," Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations (Office of the Historian of U.S. Department of State), accessed December 4, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/allende>.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine*, 133.

Eisenhower. Although most of the trip proved to be mild, upon arriving in Peru, Nixon was confronted by angry mobs that shouted him down when he attempted to speak with them. A member of his Secret Service had his tooth broken by a thrown rock. Nixon himself had chewing tobacco spit in his face. Next in Venezuela his car was attacked by an angry mob with Nixon barely escaping.<sup>104</sup> These incidences had a profound impact on Nixon's later view of the region. Kissinger's posture in many ways was more vitriolic. In his memoirs Kissinger openly admits to knowing very little about Latin America. A position that is very strange given the fact that he was the United States' top diplomat. "Latin America was an area in which I did not have much expertise".<sup>105</sup> A more apt description of his thoughts on the region come from a conversation in the White House he had with the former foreign minister of Chile, Gabriel Valdez. In response to Valdez's complaints about the difficulties of dealing with the United States, Kissinger responded,

"Mr. Minister, you made a strange speech. You come here speaking of Latin America, but this is not important. Nothing important can come from the South. History has never been produced in the South. The axis of history starts in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington, and then goes to Tokyo. What happens in the South is of no importance. You're wasting your time."<sup>106</sup>

With these facts in mind it becomes clear how and why Nixon and Kissinger believed that they had the power to control the nations within Latin America and moreover, that it was their duty to do so.

---

<sup>104</sup> Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende*, 1-3.

<sup>105</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 666.

<sup>106</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1983), 263.

Although Salvador Allende was an avowed Marxist and worked to push forth his ideology on the country by what he termed “*la via chilena al socialismo*” (the Chilean way to socialism) or “*la via*” for short, there was no indication that significant Marxist ideology was taking root in the country. Throughout his interview with Regis Debray, Allende himself commits to remaining under the powers of the constitution and that his aspiration was for the people to accept and push for socialism in their own. To Allende the democratic road to socialism could not be imposed on the people by decree. But must be taken on by the people themselves.<sup>107</sup> Although he did redistribute farmland to the Chilean peasantry, negotiate stronger union rights for workers, and bolstered Chile’s economy (at least in the short-term) the Chilean public remained politically diverse and in no way on the verge of a communist takeover.

Allende had only won 36.6% of the vote in 1970 (to Jorge Alessandri’s 35.5%) and even after the specter of U.S. intervention in the congressional elections of 1972 pushed more support towards his coalition, the UP still only held 43.4% of congressional seats. To many anti-Allende American officials in the CIA and particularly in the State Department, this just meant that the presidential election of 1976 provided a chance to remove Allende democratically, especially with the “Invisible Blockade” continuing to hamper the Chilean economy and driving down support for Allende and the UP. Despite this, Nixon and Kissinger continued to push for the military option. In a SECRET/SENSITIVE NSC memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, Kissinger laid out in dramatic fashion, what a successful Allende presidency could mean for the U.S.:

The election of Allende as President of Chile poses for us one of the most serious challenges ever faced in this hemisphere... [W]hat happens in Chile over the next

---

<sup>107</sup> Debray, *The Chilean Revolution*, 111-117.

six to twelve months will have ramifications that will go far beyond just US–Chile relations. They will have an effect on what happens in the rest of Latin America and the developing world; on what our future position will be in the hemisphere; and on the larger world picture.<sup>108</sup>

Although Kissinger continues the document by discussing the severity of the communist threat posed by Allende, it is out of a concern over how this will impact U.S. hegemony in the western hemisphere. This thought is laid out later in the document when Kissinger continues, “Yet a Titoist government in Latin America would be far more dangerous to us than it is in Europe, precisely because it can move against our policies and interests more easily and ambiguously.”<sup>109</sup> In calling the Allende government “Titoist,” Kissinger recognizes the fact that it would not be a direct agent of the Soviet Union and therefore in line with the greater Marxist plot of world domination. Kissinger’s own explanation here points to the threat toward regional stability and Chile’s ability to increase that threat “more ambiguously”. The fear here is not straight forward communist incursion but the danger of a stable anti-American regime in Latin America.

A memorandum from the CIA’s Directorate of Operations to William Broe, the Chief of Western Hemisphere for the CIA, further demonstrates at least one perspective on the lack of a credible Marxist threat presented by Allende, “Allende will be hard for the Communist Party and for Moscow to control. [He is] no blind follower of Fidel Castro nor do they and their followers agree on everything by any means.”<sup>110</sup> The threat of a Marxist of the Allende caste was very different from traditional Marxists precisely because he was a constitutionalist moderate who believed in democracy. This was well known by ranking members of the White House, NSC, and

---

<sup>108</sup> The White House, **SECRET/SENSITIVE** Memorandum for the President, “NSC Meeting, November 6–Chile, “November 5, 1970. Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 122-125.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 122-125.

<sup>110</sup> CIA Memorandum, “Chilean Crisis,” September 29, 1970. Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 10.

CIA, yet received less attention because it did not fit the “official” Cold War narrative of why the U.S. feared an Allende presidency.

Further evidence of this point comes from a 1969 estimate submitted by CIA director Richard Helm, that discredits the idea that there is any real threat of a communist take-over in the country. “An administration elected with Communist support almost certainly would take steps aimed at moving Chile away from the US and closer to the Communist countries. We believe, however, that for a variety of reasons, including fear of a reaction from the military, such an administration would be deterred from precipitate or drastic action.”<sup>111</sup> Here the CIA clearly sees the importance of the military as a bulwark against an aggressive communist approach. Yet with the coming of the Richard Nixon administration, American policy and rhetoric around the communist threat increased exponentially.

Fidel Castro felt even more pessimistic toward the Chilean military’s position and was hesitant to ally himself with Allende in any concrete or meaningful way. A **SECRET** memorandum from the Deputy Director of Plans for the CIA to the Director suggests that, although the Cuban government completely supported the government of Allende in Chile, it was disappointed because it was “insufficiently revolutionary.”<sup>112</sup> Allende’s *via chilena al socialismo*, was counter to the revolutionary violence Fidel Castro thought necessary for a true Marxist revolution, like that of his *foco* strategy in Cuba in 1958. The document continues that Castro believes that the overthrow of the Chilean government by the military or subversive group was imminent and for this reason “does not consider Chile a stable or permanent base

---

<sup>111</sup> National Intelligence Estimates, submitted by CIA Director Richard Helms, January 28, 1969. FRUS, 1969–1976, Volume E–16, Documents on Chile, 1969–1973, 1-21.

<sup>112</sup> CIA **SECRET** Memorandum, “Cuban Disappointment with the Chilean Experiment”, May 31, 1972. CIA Collection, FOIA website, U.S. State Department, accessed September 10, 2022.

from which to export the revolution to the rest of Latin America.”<sup>113</sup> The document also suggests that “[i]t is doubtful that Cuba has any concrete plans to try and help Allende counteract a coup [and] Cuba’s main effort is one of giving advice.”<sup>114</sup> Despite the limits of his revolutionary power in Latin America, Fidel Castro could see the writing on the wall and knew that the end of the Allende regime was near. Further this shows how the official bond between Allende and Castro was tepid and not nearly as much of a threat as people like Kissinger played it up to be.

Similarly, the CIA knew that Moscow’s outlook on the Chilean experiment was bleak and that much of the support the Soviets gave to Allende was mere lip service. There was no evidence to the CIA that any impactful collaboration existed between the Soviets and Chile, despite the heavy rhetoric from figures like Henry Kissinger. In his memoirs Kissinger claims, “if Chile had followed the Cuban pattern, Communist ideology would in time have been supported by Soviet forces and Soviet arms in the southern cone of the South American continent.”<sup>115</sup> The evidence from CIA reports and intelligence to which Kissinger was privy, speaks in the other direction. Despite some economic aid to help stabilize the Chilean economy the Soviets generally remained wary of Allende’s program. A CIA report from June of 1972 describes the Soviet’s “attitude toward the regime [as being] characterized by caution and restraint”.<sup>116</sup> It also discusses the Soviets refrain from referring to the UP program as socialist because it was concerned about the longevity of the Allende government and was “reluctant to antagonize the US.”<sup>117</sup> Further, the Soviets paid little attention to Latin America, with the exception of Cuba. Chile, and Latin America more generally was seen to be in the sphere of the

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>115</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 376.

<sup>116</sup> “Chile: The Alternatives Facing the Allende Regime,” National Intelligence Estimate, June 29, 1972. CIA Collection, FOIA website, accessed September 10, 2022.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 15

United States. It had little to no strategic defensive utility as it was so far from the Soviet Union. It also received the lowest amount of Soviet aid as compared to other regions and had little utility in trade as most of the resource and agricultural products produced there were the same as those from the Soviet Union.<sup>118</sup>

In a Secret/Sensitive report by the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research titled, "*Chile: Is Allende the Prelude to a Communist Victory?*," State Department officials discuss the threat to democracy present in Chile around the time of the 1970 election. However, it posits that Chile is not in any real danger of becoming a communist state. The document points to three major reasons why a Soviet-style communist takeover of Chile seems "farfetched". It discusses the importance of direct Soviet action in countries that turned toward communism in the immediate post-World War II era, the general weakness of the Communist and Socialist parties within the larger plurality of diverse parties within Chilean politics, and the mutual suspicion and animosity between the Chilean Communist and Socialist parties despite their begrudging alliance within the Chilean political scene. Given the sheer distance of Chile from the Soviet Union, the weakening power and will of the USSR to promote Soviet-style communism around the world, and the tenuous relationship between the U.S. and USSR, the document argues the unlikelihood of Chile becoming a communist threat, even if that was the will of the Communist and Socialist parties. Furthermore, the Socialist Party in Chile being the more radical leftist party of the two, the document points to its greater similarity to other political movements within the Third World and the policies of non-alignment and anti-imperialism.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Joseph L. Noguee and John W. Sloan, "Allende's Chile and the Soviet Union: A Policy Lesson for Latin American Nations Seeking Autonomy," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 21, no. 3 (August 1979): 357-358.

<sup>119</sup> State Department Research Study, "Chile: Is Allende the Prelude to a Communist Victory?" Bureau of Intelligence and Research. October 1, 1970, Senior Review Group Meetings, Box H-48, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, Richard M. Nixon Library.

The threat of an Allende-led communist takeover served more as a means of propaganda within Chile and internationally, than a true mark of fear on the part of the American security apparatus and policymakers. In the Chilean context, it was used as a tool to garner support from the armed forces, a key factor in Track II and later direct coup planning. In several memoranda from the early nineteen seventies by the CIA and NSC, directives were given to “play up” the communist threat that Allende imposed, especially through his involvement with Cuba and the Soviet Union. One of these memoranda called for further “playing up Allende’s subversion of the democratic process,”<sup>120</sup> which was not in fact happening. In this way, the CIA was actively exaggerating at best and fabricating at worst, the communist threat posed by Allende’s government through their controlled media to smear Allende in both Chile and the international community. The exaggerated rhetoric of *El Mercurio*, was the key instigator in communist based fear mongering and provides a further example of U.S. efforts to use the specter of communism as a tool to polarize the country.

It also served to build chaos in Chilean society and move it further towards “coup conditions”. This was especially true within the realm of rightwing terrorist groups like the neofascist group *Patria y Libertad*, who had direct support from CIA.<sup>121</sup> In this way, acts of rightwing terror would be used to elicit a reaction from the socialists and communists which would warrant further reaction from rightwing forces within the country, especially the military.<sup>122</sup> Polarization in this way worked to facilitate a coup without direct involvement by the U.S. and created a ticking time bomb that was built on the threat of a communist takeover of the country.

---

<sup>120</sup> National Security Council, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, **SECRET** “Covert Action Program—Chile,” November 25, 1970. Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 88.

<sup>121</sup> Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, 91.

<sup>122</sup> Kornbluh, 94.



The main issue concerning the United States was not the Marxist nature of Salvador Allende's presidency but the fact that a shrewd politician that was thoroughly opposed to U.S. involvement in his country had come to power and was willing to use that power to harm U.S. hegemony in Latin America. The context of the Cold War and the threat of Marxism had played a significant part in the coalitions that the United States had built since World War II and the covert action decisions made by successive presidential administrations and the CIA. However, the threat of a significant communist uprising spreading through Latin America was highly unlikely. The real threat was of a self-aware Latin America that looked at what the United States had done, especially with covert action and decided to loosen their connections and commitments to the global order established by the U.S. during that time.

The Kennedy and Johnson administrations had invested heavily in the development of the Chilean economy.<sup>123</sup> An investment that the Nixon administration thought would come to nothing if it allowed a president like Allende to rise to power. Covert action took a different dimension in both the Kennedy and especially Johnson administrations in Latin America when considering the 1964 Brazilian coup. In this case, Johnson leveraged the friendly relationship between American and Brazilian military leaders to provide physical and moral support for a coup against Brazil's leftist president João Goulart. An example closely studied by the Nixon administration in its effort to facilitate strong relations with Chilean military leaders in the run-up to the coup in Chile. Although U.S. military aid was not needed in Brazil, Johnson made sure it was ready if the call came.<sup>124</sup> In the minds of American leaders, they had done what they needed to do to keep the world safe from Soviet communism and push forth an American led world order. But some of those decisions had negative consequences, especially for the people of the

---

<sup>123</sup> Michaels, *The Alliance for Progress*, 78.

<sup>124</sup> Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine*, 120-122.

countries the U.S. meddled in. This eventually became a circular problem as covert action caused the need for cover ups, which in turn called for more covert action. This cycle was perfectly played out in the Watergate scandal that ultimately ended Nixon's presidency.<sup>125</sup> In this way Marxism can be looked at as the main cause of the U.S. supported coup in Chile. But it was the much older fight against communism that forced a world order where the U.S. thought its only way to maintain its position in the world was to topple democratic allies that happened to elect politicians it did not like.<sup>126</sup> Had the U.S. not moved to meddle with the Allende administration and instead continued its economic blockade without other clandestine operations there is a very good chance he would have been a one term president. However, the White House and CIA's need to force him from power ultimately caused them to be perceived as the imperialists Allende claimed they were.

By August 1973 the CIA could see the writing on the wall. The situation in Chile had become increasingly chaotic and the notion that the military would play some part in the government soon became clearer. In a SECRET Intelligence Memorandum, the CIA begins to lay out the potential benefits for the U.S. if the military lead an all-out coup against the Allende administration. Among these benefits were the probability that the new regime would be "favorably disposed to the US [and] without prompt and large-scale support from the US, the new government could not survive."<sup>127</sup> The new government was also likely to seek to settle some of the ongoing copper expropriation compensation disputes. In addition, the new government would probably open itself to greater private foreign investment and had the potential become

---

<sup>125</sup> Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 45-46.

<sup>126</sup> Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side*, 5-6.

<sup>127</sup> "Consequences of a Military Coup in Chile," Intelligence Memorandum, August 1, 1973. CIA Collection, FOIA website, accessed September 10, 2022.

more stable over time.<sup>128</sup> These factors would also push Chile securely back within the hegemonic sphere of the U.S. and put it back on the path set for it under the Alliance for Progress, however now without democracy. Interestingly many of the predictions of the memorandum would come true less than two months after its dissemination.

### Conclusion

When considering U.S. government action during the Cold War it is of paramount importance that the causes and impacts of those decisions are well understood. When studying top secret documents this can often get confusing as clandestine activity is, by its nature, a deceptive and confusing business. It often takes reading between the lines and viewing the issue from multiple angles to grasp the intentions behind the actions taken by people with such power and means. Henry Kissinger himself thought it distasteful to discuss clandestine action in print and this impacts how his writing, and the text of classified documents must be read.<sup>129</sup>

The Cold War is clearly the context for U.S. involvement in Chile but not in the way that it is typically presented. By 1973 the paradigm of the Cold War had changed. Leaders like Kissinger and Nixon understood this, yet they were still trapped in Cold War thinking, a product of the times. The constant struggle with countries like the USSR, China, and Vietnam muddied these waters as did the process of reconciliation and opening of diplomatic channels through détente. The U.S. moved against Allende because he threatened its global dominance and especially the dominance over the western hemisphere. This came from a long tradition of asserting U.S. power in the hemisphere through the Monroe Doctrine and the expression of American power through its meteoric rise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>129</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 658.

removing Allende this threat was abated but, in many ways, it was also exacerbated. The amount of destruction wrought on countries like Chile still impacts the global order today and the loss of faith in U.S. leadership continues to impact American credibility. In trying to maintain its credibility, the American government lost a great deal of it over time. This may be one of the most pervasive legacies of both the Monroe Doctrine and the Cold War on U.S. foreign affairs and one that should not easily be forgotten.

## Bibliography

### Primary Source

#### Archives/Print

Anderson, Jack. "Memos Bare ITT Try for Chile Coup." *Washington Post*. March 21, 1972.

"Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum." CIA Collection. U.S. Department of State, July 2000. <https://foia.state.gov/>.

Church, Frank. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, April 29, 1976.

"Exposing America's Role in Chile." *The New York Times*, October 6, 1999.

*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XXI, Chile, 1969–1973*, eds. James McElveen and James Siekmeier (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010).

*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E–16, Documents on Chile, 1969–1973*, eds. James McElveen and James Siekmeier (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2015).

Kornbluh, Peter. *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2013.

#### Memoirs

Kissinger, Henry. *Henry Kissinger: White House Years*. 1. Vol. 1. 3 vols. Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1979.

Nixon, Richard M. *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978.

#### Interviews

Debray Régis, and Allende Salvador Gossens. *The Chilean Revolution: Conversations with Allende*. New York, NY: Random House, 1971.

## Secondary Sources

### Books

Freedman, Lawrence. *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos and Vietnam*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Grow, Michael. *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008.

Hersh, Seymour M. *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*. New York, NY: Summit Books, 1983.

Hunt, Michael H. *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007

Kornbluh, Peter. *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2013.

Logevall, Fredrik, and Andrew Preston. *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Pipes, Daniel, and Adam M. Garfinkle. *Friendly Tyrants: An American Dilemma*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1991.

Qureshi, Lubna Z. *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.

Schmitz, David F. *Thank God They're On Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921-1965*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Schwartz, Thomas A. *Henry Kissinger and American Power*. New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 2020.

Smith, Gaddis. *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1994.

“The Allende Years and the Pinochet Coup, 1969–1973.” Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations. Office of the Historian of U.S. Department of State. Accessed December 4, 2021. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/allende>.

Westad, Odd Arne. *The Cold War: A World History*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2019.

## Articles/Websites

- Blanton, Thomas. "The Chile Documentation Project." The Chile Documentation Project | National Security Archive. Accessed October 28, 2022. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/project/chile-documentation-project>.
- Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. "Chile, The Coup and The Gringos." *Berkeley Bard*. April 4, 1975.
- Michaels, Albert L. "The Alliance for Progress and Chile's 'Revolution in Liberty,' 1964-1970." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 18, no. 1 (February 1976): 74–99.
- Morley, Morris, and Steven Smith. "Imperial 'Reach': U.S. Policy and the CIA in Chile." *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 5, no. 2 (1977): 203–16.
- Nogee, Joseph L., and John W. Sloan. "Allende's Chile and the Soviet Union: A Policy Lesson for Latin American Nations Seeking Autonomy." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 21, no. 3 (August 1979): 339–68.
- Rivera, Julius. "Political Parties and the Politics of Development in Latin America." *Social Research* 36, no. 2 (1969): 294–314.
- Sands, David R. "Chile Under Frei: The Alliance for Progress." *The Fletcher Forum*, 1982, 33–60. f
- Strafford, Peter. "Chile: Regime in Quandary." *The World Today* 31, no. 4 (April 1975): 153–60.
- Valenzuela, Arturo, and Pamela Constable. "Democracy in Chile." *Current History* 90, no. 553 (February 1991): 53–85.
- Whitehead, Laurence. "Why Allende Fell." *The World Today* 29, no. 11 (November 1973): 461–74.
- Wright, Thomas C., and Rody Oñate Zúñiga. "Chilean Political Exile." *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 4 (July 2007): 31–49.

## Vita

Originally from Southeastern Connecticut, Seth received a B.A. in Government from the University of Texas at Austin in 2016. Following his graduation, he lived and taught English in Murcia, Spain where he became interested in the fall of democracy through the history of the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. From there he moved to Dallas, Texas, completing an M.A. in Education from the Texas A&M University at Commerce. At this time, Seth also began teaching AP United States History in Dallas Public Schools and continued there until 2020. In 2020, Seth moved to New Orleans and began teaching AP U.S. History and Economics at the Academy of the Sacred Heart. While teaching at Sacred Heart he enrolled at the University of New Orleans, where he will receive an M.A. in History in the Fall of 2022. Seth has continued to pursue his interest in what causes the fall of democracies, completing his graduate thesis on United States involvement in the 1973 coup of the democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende. Seth aspires to continue his education by pursuing a doctoral degree in political science with a focus on institutional development and democratic structures.