

The Pinochet Coup and the U.S. Factor

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On 4 September 1970, Salvador Allende was elected President of Chile. His road to presidency had been long and troublesome, but his election renewed hope that socialism could be reached through democratic means. In some aspects, it was a new beginning. In others, his term in office would be the last stage of a covert war against the Left in Chile, waged by the United States.

Four days after his election, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report stated that the United States had no vital national interests in Chile. Indeed, a Marxist administration in Chile could hardly alter the balance of power or the overall strategic situation between Capitalism and Communism. An election in Chile hardly had the potential to alter the dynamics of Russo-Chilean relations. Allende's presidency was not a national security threat in and of itself. The CIA report, however, went on to state that the real danger in Allende's election victory lay in the economic and psychological conditions it would create. According to the CIA, an Allende victory "...represented a definite psychological setback to the United States and a definite psychological advantage for the Marxist idea."¹

Richard Nixon would later allege that an Italian businessman came up to him and warned him that *"If Allende should win the election in Chile and then you have Castro in Cuba, what you will in effect have in Latin America is a red sandwich. And eventually it will all be red."* and David Frost, the journalist interviewing Nixon, would oppose his point: *"If it's a red sandwich, it's got two pieces of bread here and here and an enormous bit of beef in the middle. I mean, are you really saying that Brazil should feel itself surrounded by Cuba and Chile?"*²

The exaggeration of the strategic danger by American officials aside, they took Allende's election quite seriously. Despite diplomatic relations between Chile and the

¹ William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military & CIA Interventions since World War II* (London: Zed Books, 2004), 216.

² Lubna Z. Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 56.

United States showing relative calm in the immediate aftermath of Allende's election, American (and overall capitalist) efforts to first undermine Allende's inauguration, and then to prevent the consolidation of his administration rarely lost steam. Indeed, the covert war had been ongoing for more than a decade.

From Allende's first attempt at presidency, the covert war waged by the United States demonstrated many different facets, from a comprehensive economic blockade to diplomatic isolation, funding Allende's opposition, fomenting military unrest, kidnappings, street violence and the eventual military coup on 11 September 1973.

This paper aims to examine and assess, based on recent literature from various disciplines, the extent of the intervention by the United States in Chile between 1958 and 1973. The first chapter focuses on the period before Salvador Allende's election, attempting to determine why an Allende presidency was dangerous to the United States and the actions taken to prevent his ascendance. The second chapter focuses on Allende's term as president and the evolution of his struggle to keep his administration alive. The final chapter tells the story of the 11 September 1973 coup by the Chilean military, touching upon the crucial question of whether the CIA was responsible for the coup.

The questions raised by this paper are: what was the extent of American intervention in Chile? What stake did the United States have in preventing and later overthrowing an Allende-run Chile? And how much of the responsibility for Allende's eventual downfall rests upon the United States?

The covert war waged by the United States was so multifaceted and comprehensive that whether the American intelligence services were directly responsible for triggering or directing the military coup of 1973 is a technicality. From the economic blockade to fomenting civil and military unrest, the United States was responsible for the failure of the Allende administration. Salvador Allende and his government, however, share a non-negligible part of the responsibility due to their inefficiency in responding to American influence and intervention, although, admittedly, not for lack of effort.

1. An Overview of U.S. Intervention in Chile between 1958 and 1970

Politics became a part of Salvador Allende's life from a young age. His family could be considered well-off, even a part of Chilean bourgeoisie, but as a teen he was ex-

posed to and influenced by Marxism, and later, as a student leader, he played an important role in the establishment of the Socialist Party.

In Allende's own words, "...the Communist Party already existed, but we analyzed the situation in Chile, and we believed that there was a place for a party which, while holding similar views in terms of philosophy and doctrine - a Marxist approach to the interpretation of history - would be a party free from ties of an international nature."³ As a medical doctor, he witnessed firsthand the effects of poverty on public health, and was concerned with, and deeply invested in, the wellbeing of his people.⁴ As evident in his own account of the Socialist Party, Allende's understanding of socialism, in some aspects, differed from the other revolutionaries of the region and the period. He had a certain nationalist 'spirit', that would be appreciated even by U.S. officials in the future.⁵

Allende wasn't an isolationist by any means. He emphasized the importance of a greater international context, and the nature of his ties to other revolutionaries in the region, mainly Cuba, would come to be one of the defining factors of his administration, but from the very beginning there was very little genuine risk of Chile turning into a Russian satellite.

Allende took part in Chilean politics from the early 1930's. During the Interwar years and the Second World War, the priority of the Chilean Left was to remain afloat. He would later state that during this period they had to make a choice between bourgeois democracy or fascism, and they opted for bourgeois democracy.⁶ Allende himself, however, remained in politics and remained a socialist militant, running for president unsuccessfully in 1952 for the first time.

Allende's persistence in staying within the boundaries of parliamentary democracy would later become his legacy. In character and action, he was a man of nuances. An adamant believer in socialism, with strong ties to Latin America's revolutionary streak, he was also a firm believer in democracy and the Chilean Way to socialism, i.e. socialism through democracy. Chilean writer Gonzalo Rojas Pizarro would describe him as a man with the body and mind of a democratic statesman and the heart

³ Régis Debray, *Conversations with Allende: Socialism in Chile*, translated by Ben Brewster, Peter Beglan, Marguerita Sanchez and Peter Gowan (London: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 1971), 62.

⁴ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 23.

⁵ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 95.

⁶ Debray, *Conversations with Allende: Socialism in Chile*, 71.

of a revolutionary.⁷ This nuanced character would later reflect on his term as President, his actions, and shortcomings.

From the mid-1950s, Chile's financial and societal situation necessitated active measures to combat inflation and promote and realize various reforms. Economic development was the main goal, followed by a balanced program to reform in hopes of mending the divides within society, but the primary actors of all political backgrounds disagreed on what role private property and the capital was supposed to play in this process.⁸ As political life gained vitality and dynamism, the Chilean Left grew bolder. Allende himself ran for president first in 1952, and repeated his attempt in 1958. Jorge Alessandri won the 1958 elections. Jorge was the son of Arturo Alessandri, who had ruled Chile for three non-consecutive terms between 1920 and 1938.⁹ The margin between Allende's vote and Alessandri's was narrow, and thus this was the first occasion when the U.S. became alarmed of the potential danger in Chile. Indeed, U.S. influence and even intervention in Chile was not news. Chilean bourgeoisie was, in some aspects, effectively a satellite of U.S. capital. Institutional relations between the two countries, or Chilean dependency upon the U.S. economy was a fact, even in the 1950's. Chilean military had been receiving aid and training, at least since 1945, from the U.S. The transfer of technical expertise, military equipment and replacement parts helped form close professional and ideological bonds between the Chilean army and their North American counterparts.¹⁰ Therefore, Allende coming close to being elected was a warning sign for the U.S. leadership at the time.

The Kennedy administration, starting from 1961, took the steps they deemed necessary for preventing a possible Allende presidency, the first of which was the establishment of an electoral committee consisting of White House officials, the State Department, and the CIA. Their effort would culminate during the 1964 election process, when the CIA actively supported Eduardo Frei against Allende. Their effort was comprehensive, and they left little to chance. As the elections drew near, as many as 100 American operatives were involved in the operation to ensure Allende did not get elected. Infiltrating political structures, establishing operational relationships with key political parties, creating propaganda mechanisms and establishing a certain or-

⁷ Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 12.

⁸ John L. Rector, *The History of Chile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 155.

⁹ Sergio Villalobos R., *A Short History of Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1996), 171.

¹⁰ Morris Morley, Steven Smith, "Imperial 'Reach': U.S. Policy and the CIA in Chile", *Journal of Political & Military Sociology*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1977), 208.

ganizational capacity to intervene in the elections were the primary objectives.¹¹ Now all they needed was a favorite in the elections, and this person turned out to be Eduardo Frei.

The operation during the election process was divided into two. The first half of the effort was the direct funding of Frei's party, namely the Christian Democratic Party. The second half was an exhaustive propaganda campaign against Allende.¹² The official U.S. Senate report written in 1975 had the estimate of 3 million dollars being spent for the 1964 elections by the Central Intelligence Agency.¹³ Another estimate, however, went as high up as 20 million dollars. The propaganda was at times indirect, as in supporting media personalities and institutions who stayed in line with U.S. interests in Chile and Latin America in general. At times the effort was quite direct, as in having Chilean groups plaster posters on walls and distribute propaganda pamphlets.¹⁴ In any case, propaganda operations were central to the U.S. covert war in Chile. Women played an especially important role in the propaganda effort against Allende. The aim was to use the traditional religious beliefs of the Chilean public to manipulate them against communism, which would be framed as godlessness. Radio also played an important part: *"One radio spot featured the sound of a machine gun, followed by a woman's cry: 'They have killed my child – the communists!' The announcer then added in impassioned tones: 'Communism offers only blood and pain. For this not to happen in Chile, we must elect Eduardo Frei president.'"*¹⁵ The effort of the Americans, in conjunction with the Chilean bourgeoisie, ended up being successful. Eduardo Frei was elected, and there was no sign of the narrow margin seen in the 1958 elections this time. Frei got 56% of the votes, while Allende was stuck at 39%.¹⁶ After 6 years of Frei's presidency, Allende would try again.

One of the main differences between the situation in 1958 and 1970 was the success of the Cuban Revolution. As the Cuban Revolution transformed the overall standing of socialism in Latin America, Allende himself was the key figure in the relations be-

¹¹ Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military & CIA Interventions since World War II*, 207.

¹² Jaechun Kim, "Democratic Peace and Covert War: A Case Study of the U.S. Covert War in Chile", *Journal of International and Area Studies*, Vol. 12, No.1 (June 2005), 30.

¹³ United States Senate, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973, Staff Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 2.

¹⁴ United States Senate, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 8.

¹⁵ Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military & CIA Interventions since World War II*, 208.

¹⁶ Rector, *The History of Chile*, 162.

tween the Chilean Left and the Cuban revolutionaries.¹⁷ Although Allende was older and more experienced than Castro himself, the two men built a close working relationship in addition to a genuine comradeship, and close ties with Havana became a central feature in Allende's rise to power, as well as his term in office. "*Indeed,*" as Tanya Harmer states, "*Allende's political standing and his loyalty to the Cuban cause meant that Havana's leaders regarded him as a highly significant ally.*"¹⁸

Of course, the Cuban Revolution was not the only factor changing the dynamics in Chile and Latin America in general between 1964 and 1970. Allende also gained more power, working as the President of the Senate between 1966 and 1969. Another central difference between the 1964 and 1970 elections were the relative lack of interference by the United States in the elections. Partly because the new Nixon government was not, as of yet, oriented to the risks of socialism in Chile, and partly because of Nixon seeking a mature partnerships with countries in Latin America, the U.S. adopted a more non-interventionist stance for the 1970 elections. This did not mean there was no interference whatsoever, since multiple meetings took place in late 1969 and throughout 1970 to support the anti-Allende powers, but funding and overall support for the 'spoiling operations' during the election campaign, compared to 1964, was ultimately insufficient.¹⁹

Henry Kissinger, U.S. President Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor, famously remarked, "*I don't see why we have to let a country go Marxist just because its people are irresponsible.*"²⁰ He funded the operations to help defeat Allende, but unlike the 1964 elections, U.S. officials did not focus their support on the most likely candidate to win, who was the previous President, Jorge Alessandri, and with a margin of less than 2% of the votes, Alessandri lost.²¹

On the 4th of September 1970, Salvador Allende was elected President of Chile. Allende being elected represented a crucial moment for the struggle for socialism in Latin America. Allende's 'Chilean way' succeeded, and Cubans' skepticism towards the belief that socialism could be achieved through democracy was finally eased. Indeed, even before the election, Fidel Castro had acknowledged that the ballot box could lead to socialism.²² Allende's victory was celebrated immensely in Cuba. They

¹⁷ Debray, *Conversations with Allende: Socialism in Chile*, 76.

¹⁸ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 30.

¹⁹ United States Senate, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 22.

²⁰ Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), 430.

²¹ Rector, *The History of Chile*, 171.

²² Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 52.

knew their methods were different, but their ideals were the same. Allende would later tell the story of how Castro reacted to the elections in Chile: “*He sent me a copy of Granna, the official organ of the Cuban revolution, which had the news of our electoral victory splashed across the front page. He had been at the offices of the newspaper waiting for the news from Chile, and he sent his congratulations on the front page proclaiming that ours was a victory against imperialism, signed it and had it signed by everyone around him. I keep it as a souvenir.*”²³

News of Allende’s election was met with a ‘stunned surprise’ from Kissinger. For the overall Nixon administration, Latin America suddenly became critically important.²⁴ Their inability to prevent Allende’s election now caused them to scramble for preventing his inauguration, and indeed, they had a window of opportunity. According to the Chilean constitution, since none of the presidential candidates received the absolute majority, the Chilean Senate now had to appoint the president, or essentially ratify the results of the election. It was customary for the Senate to simply elect the candidate who received the most votes. It was seen possible, however, to influence the Senate to appoint Alessandri as the president instead of Allende.²⁵ Which meant that the U.S. had around 50 days to reverse the results of the September elections.

It was then that close working relations between the Nixon administration, the CIA, and the big business in Chile came to the fore. Agustin Edwards, the owner of most of Chile’s copper mines, famous right-wing newspaper *El Mercurio* and the Pepsi-Cola bottling plant, was made contact with. He would soon be joined by Donald Kendall, the CEO of Pepsi, and one of Nixon’s closest financial supporters.²⁶ From that point onwards, they would work closely together with the CIA to first prevent Allende’s inauguration, and then to remove him as president.

The CIA divided its effort into two tracks. One was political, the second was military. Track I was the total sum of the political effort to foil Allende’s official appointment as president. The CIA mobilized to realize an integrated plan consisting of political action, economic effort and a propaganda campaign. The priority was, instead of relying on Alessandri, somehow ensuring the continuation Eduardo Frei’s rule. For this to happen they attempted to induce the Chilean senate to appoint Alessandri as President, so that, as it was believed at the time, Alessandri could resign immediately,

²³ Debray, *Conversations with Allende: Socialism in Chile*, 74.

²⁴ Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 49.

²⁵ Kim, “Democratic Peace and Covert War: A Case Study of the U.S. Covert War in Chile”, 31.

²⁶ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, 432.

paving the way for a special, renewed election, where Frei could once again run as a candidate. This convoluted effort bore little fruit, not least because Frei refused to interfere with a constitutional process.²⁷

The other elements of Track I were based on propaganda, financial manipulation and interference with political processes in general. The targets of the propaganda effort were to be the Chilean elite, the Chilean military and Frei himself. The media played a central role in this phase, with the goal of creating concerns about Chile's future if a Marxist is elected by the senate. The scenario created rested upon the image of an economic collapse in the event of an Allende presidency. Foreign newspapers and journalists flowed into Chile, and when Allende criticized Edwards' *El Mercurio*, the CIA orchestrated cables and declarations in support of *El Mercurio*, attacking Allende. Despite its central role, CIA-affiliated media was not the only player there. The U.S. also relied upon an exhaustive propaganda campaign with political rallies, radio programs, advertisements, and the funding of *Patria y Libertad*, a far-right paramilitary group. The American press itself was also involved. Track I also included the effort to raise the economic pressure put on Chile to demonstrate the presumed damage an Allende presidency would leave Chile with. An economic crisis would prevent Allende's inauguration, it was believed.²⁸ Ultimately it was not Track I, but Track II, that determined the result of the CIA effort to stop Allende.

Track II was focused on directing the Chilean military towards a coup d'état.²⁹ Although it is explicitly stated in the Senate Report that Tracks I and II both had the aim of a coup d'état, the main difference was that Track II focused on convincing the military to take action, instead of securing the support and help of Eduardo Frei. In an attempt to ensure the intervention by Chilean military, the U.S. at some point threatened them with cutting military aid and assistance.³⁰ This aid and assistance were crucial for the Chilean military, not least because hundreds, if not thousands of Chilean officers were trained at the School of the Americas. One of them was a soldier named Augusto Pinochet.³¹

Between Track I and Track II and high tides in U.S. intervention in Chile, the breaking point came in October 1970, when an operation to kidnap René Schneider, the Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean military, went south. Up until that point the CIA

²⁷ United States Senate, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 24.

²⁸ United States Senate, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 25.

²⁹ Kim, "Democratic Peace and Covert War: A Case Study of the U.S. Covert War in Chile", 31.

³⁰ United States Senate, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 26.

³¹ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 40.

was working against the wishes of Edward Korry, the U.S. Ambassador in Santiago, to create an environment that could birth a military coup. Korry was hesitant. *“Any attempt on our part actively to encourage a coup could lead us to a Bay of Pigs failure.”* he warned Kissinger. His objections fell on deaf ears. Kissinger instead drove the CIA to further action. A cable from Washington, D.C., to Santiago, read: *“Contact the military and let them know USG wants a military solution, and that we will support them now and later... Create at least some sort of coup climate... Sponsor a military move.”*³²

Instead of a proper coup d'état by the Chilean Army, a plan was put in motion to kidnap General René Schneider. As head of the military forces, he firmly opposed any involvement in politics, and was a major obstruction for coup planners. The plan was to kidnap him, bring him to Argentina, and steer the new military leadership into establishing a military junta.³³ The weapons for the hit were provided by the CIA, and the operation would be carried out by the coordination of two pro-U.S. gangs within the Chilean army. On 22nd October, with no protection personnel save for a driver, he was ambushed on his way to work by a gang of armed men.³⁴ Schneider drew his weapon, but his last-minute effort did not suffice in saving him. He was shot multiple times, and died three days later. One of the machine guns supplied by the CIA was later discovered at the crime scene.³⁵ From the beginning Allende would be well aware that the conspiracy against him came both from inside Chile, and outside.³⁶

The attempt backfired. Instead of fomenting further instability, the efforts of the CIA unintentionally led to the consolidation of the Chilean public around Allende. He was elected President by the senate, and was inaugurated on the 3rd of November. Allende had declared throughout his campaign that his aim was to achieve a fundamental change. *“During the electoral campaign we said that the purpose of our struggle was to change the regime, the system. That we sought to form a government in order to obtain the power to carry out the revolutionary transformation which Chile needs, to break the nation’s economic, political, cultural and trade union dependency.”*³⁷

Now he would try to overthrow this system, and be met with a covert war.

³² Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, 435.

³³ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 63.

³⁴ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, 437.

³⁵ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 64.

³⁶ Debray, *Conversations with Allende: Socialism in Chile*, 103.

³⁷ Debray, *Conversations with Allende: Socialism in Chile*, 81.

2. Quarantining Allende's Chile: 1970-1973

Allende knew his road would be rough and steep. In the first months of his presidency, he acted to reconfigure Chile's foreign policy, establish closer ties with his comrades in Cuba and other socialist countries like China, build cautiously cordial relations with the U.S. and the capitalist world. As Castro's Cuba initially refrained from provoking the U.S. by making a show of force by emphasizing Cuba's closer ties with Chile too much, the U.S. also initially and involuntarily decided to act "...publicly 'correct' when it came to opposing Allende."³⁸

The first stages of Allende's administration were not only directed at reorienting Chile in the global world. Allende was hard at work to realize his campaign promises, and further the cause of socialism in Chile. Eliminating, or at least limiting, poverty was a priority that Allende stressed. Malnutrition in infants was seen as an essential problem, and the government was now distributing free milk to every child. Making bread more accessible and affordable was another priority.³⁹ Restraining inflation was another main goal in the earlier stages, but this would prove harder to realize. Another main problem was the nationalization of the copper and steel industries, as well as saltpetre production. Land reform and controlling the exports and imports through the State were among the major goals of Allende's coalition, the Unidad Popular. The aim was to collectivize the majority of Chile's production, but as per socialist principles, the goal was not the abolishment of the private sector, but its inhibition. Allende's aim above all others was to make Chile economically independent. "*If these things,*" he would later come to say, emphasizing not only his anti-imperialist tone but his patriotic sentiments, "*- affirming our national sovereignty, recovering our basic wealth and attacking monopolies – do not lead to Socialism, I don't know what does. But there will be no further doubt as to whether we hold real power as soon as Chile becomes an economically independent country. Hence our basic, most vital principle is one of anti-imperialism, as a first step towards the making of structural changes.*"⁴⁰

Allende was very well aware of what a huge undertaking this was for a recently elected socialist leader. He was, however, intent on transforming the system. He would rely on his popularity among the masses, and when the bourgeois system was

³⁸ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 68.

³⁹ Debray, *Conversations with Allende: Socialism in Chile*, 84.

⁴⁰ Debray, *Conversations with Allende: Socialism in Chile*, 85.

too stiff to change, Allende would go to the public, by way of plebiscites.⁴¹ He aimed to ensure the participation of the Chilean people into the revolution.

This rhetoric of nationalization, anti-imperialism and economic independence was terrifying for corporations based in Chile. Big business with close ties to the CIA and the White House was especially agitated. Allende was intent on nationalizing copper, most of which was owned by Agustin Edwards, and his intention in nationalizing the telephone companies to ensure cheaper and more effective telecommunications made the ITT, an American corporation, infinitely uneasy.⁴² Big business and the CIA would work increasingly closer together during Allende's term. Like Pepsico, ITT had been a client of Richard Nixon's law firm before his election as president. Thus, these corporations had more than the president's ear, they had his support and protection. The CIA and the White House were concerned with protecting the interests of U.S. corporations in Chile, rather than the overall strategic standing of the U.S. PepsiCo's Donald Kendall had been an adamant opposer of a socialist administration in Chile. He had remarked, *"I will tell the President he cannot stand for a Cuba in his administration."*⁴³

Admittedly, for better or worse, Chile was not Cuba, and despite their close ties, Allende was not Castro. But still, after the failure in preventing Allende's assumption of power, now the efforts of the U.S. would focus on creating enough economic unrest in Chile to make Allende's socialist system crumble. The 40 Committee, charged with undermining the Chilean experiment, approved more than 7 million dollars after Allende's inauguration for anti-socialist action in Chile. The media, primarily the infamous El Mercurio, once again came to the forefront. Patria y Libertad was abundantly funded.⁴⁴ *"Broadly speaking,"* as would be stated in the Senate report, *"U.S. policy sought to maximize the pressures on the Allende government to prevent its consolidation and limit its ability to implement policies contrary to U.S. and hemispheric interests. (...) Other governments were encouraged to adopt similar policies, and the U.S. increased efforts to maintain close relations with friendly military leaders in the hemisphere. The 'cool but correct' overt posture denied the Allende government a handy foreign enemy to use as a domestic and international rallying point. At the same time, covert action was one reflection of the concerns felt in Washington: the desire to frustrate*

⁴¹ Debray, *Conversations with Allende: Socialism in Chile*, 97.

⁴² Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 67.

⁴³ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 51.

⁴⁴ Kim, "Democratic Peace and Covert War: A Case Study of the U.S. Covert War in Chile", 32.

*Allende's experiment in the Western Hemisphere and thus limit its attractiveness as a model...*⁴⁵

As Allende looked to improve Chile's diplomatic relations and economic situation, the doors of international financial institutions, as per the initiative of the Nixon administration, started closing in Allende's face one by one. The economic blockade Chile was put under did not simply consist of worsening trade relations between the U.S. and Chile. Had that been the case, the Allende administration could have worked around that problem with a variety of methods. Instead, U.S. officials worked to ensure that global institutions would not assist Chile. Credit loans and overall trade relations that had been integrated into the world economic system and been a part of almost every country's economic routine were being withheld from Chile.

The U.S. had direct influence with the Inter-American Development Bank. The U.S. representative simply told the IDB that he did not have the authority to vote for loans to Chile. Chilean requests were tied up in bureaucracy. At the World Bank, the intervention was more indirect. There, the American officials did not have the right to veto loans. Instead, they worked through personal relations to make sure that Chile did not receive a 21-million-dollar livestock improvement credit. The World Bank delegation asked the Chilean officials a series of questions that would demonstrate that Allende's economic policies were not creditworthy. These questions were supplied to the World Bank delegation by the U.S. State Department.⁴⁶ The drop in Chile's credibility was gradual, but rapid and severe. Another crucial loss was the cutoff of Export-Import Bank credits. Chile's attempt to obtain credits to buy three jets for its national airline was also ultimately unsuccessful.

There was, however, one exception to the economic blockade. Loans, grants, aid and assistance to the Chilean army were never cut off, and by some measurements, increased in certain areas. *"The arms sales and the financial quarantine would work in tandem,"* Lubna Qureshi says, *"letting the Chilean officers understand that they could only benefit from a change in government. Although Washington had successfully estranged itself from the Chilean government, it maintained close contact with the Chilean military."*⁴⁷ An overview of loans and grants to Chile throughout the various terms of U.S. presidents demonstrates the gravity of Chile's economic isolation. As the charts

⁴⁵ United States Senate, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 27.

⁴⁶ Peter Kornbluh, "Declassifying U.S. Intervention in Chile", *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 32, No. 6 (1999), 40.

⁴⁷ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 97.

that Jaechun Kim makes use of in his article clearly indicate, both presidents Alessandri and Frei enjoyed substantial loans from the U.S. directly. Grants from the U.S. to Chile during the Alessandri administration were around 97.5 million dollars, and during Frei's term, 77.2 million dollars. The Allende administration received no loans from the U.S., and merely 19.8 million dollars in grants. Between the Alessandri and Frei administrations, Chile received almost 1 billion dollars from the United States alone, and this figure excludes loans obtained from global financial institutions, such as Eximbank. The loans provided to the Chilean military by the U.S. during the Frei administration amounted to 19.4 million dollars, while during Allende's term this amount rose up to 27.4 million dollars. Loans granted to the Alessandri administration by global institutions were around 150 million dollars, and to the Frei administration, more than 260 million dollars. During the Allende administration this dropped to 4.7 million dollars.⁴⁸ In other words, Chile went from receiving the most aid per capita from the U.S. compared to every other country in the region⁴⁹, to receiving almost nothing.

However, the U.S. always aimed at maintaining their distance from the worsening situation in Chile. Plausible deniability was the primary goal. Up until the very end, they put effort into maintaining regular diplomatic relations with Chile. Allende wanted Chile to have well-functioning relations with the world, and was relatively moderate in his methods. Therefore, Chile aimed to remain within the system. This allowed the U.S. to use the global economic and diplomatic system to cut the lifelines of the Chilean economy. By the end of 1972, revolutionary fervor in Chile was faltering.⁵⁰ Together with the economic blockade and the meddling by the U.S., Allende's Chile was effectively facing a covert war, subverting the general assumption within the 'democratic peace' theory that democracies do not wage war on each other.⁵¹

The covert war was not limited to economic blockade and propaganda. Instigating social unrest was another central feature. Facing economic isolation and social turmoil, the Chilean people were vulnerable. Certainly not every instance of social unrest was the result of manipulation by the CIA, but the conspiracy against Allende certainly included elements of orchestrated protests and strikes. Although the CIA would later refute this, during the times of increased instability, a comprehensive strike by truckers, that thoroughly affected the country's logistical capabilities, a re-

⁴⁸ Kim, "Democratic Peace and Covert War: A Case Study of the U.S. Covert War in Chile", 34-35.

⁴⁹ Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 106.

⁵⁰ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 176.

⁵¹ Kim, "Democratic Peace and Covert War: A Case Study of the U.S. Covert War in Chile", 44.

porter stated that in a poor and struggling country, the striking truckers were surprisingly well equipped and stocked. When the reporter asked where the money for the relatively luxurious money came from, one of the truckers, with an amused expression, replied: “*The CIA!*”⁵²

As the economic isolation worsened, Allende increasingly turned to Cuba and the USSR. The Soviets, however, in addition to not having very close ties to Chile from the start, were not interested in creating another Cuba to maintain on the other side of the world. In late 1972, the Soviets downgraded their definition of Chile from a country ‘building socialism’ to ‘a Third World country, seeking free and independent development’.⁵³ Allende was not looking to become another Cuba for the Soviets to support, either. His unique nationalist character would not allow it. Still, facing the wrath of the U.S., he did need support from the USSR. They were not completely unhelpful, but Chilean exports were hardly profitable for the Soviets. They provided Chile with credits up to 40 million dollars, but Allende had been desiring to receive around 200 million dollars from them.⁵⁴

Allende was stuck. The Chilean economy had not completely collapsed, nor had the society itself, but the destabilization was at an undeniable high. The country showed signs of breaking at some point in the future. ‘The Chilean way’ was under heavy strain. And it was not only the Right that was done with Allende, the radical Left was also turning away from him as well. Clashes between the left-wing MIR and far-right paramilitary group Patria y Libertad were becoming commonplace.⁵⁵ Street violence increased, and so did strikes, shortages, and overall isolation of Allende’s socialist Chile in the world. The public was concerned and confused, Allende’s Unidad Popular was growing fragmented, and General Augusto Pinochet was intent on eliminating the left-wing MIR.⁵⁶ In the words of Hal Brands, “*The Chilean road to Socialism was hitting a dead end.*”⁵⁷

3. ‘Another September 11’: The Pinochet Coup

Among the rising street violence, an Arms Control Law, enforced by the Chilean military, almost completely wiped out the Left’s potential to resist the Right’s esca-

⁵² Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military & CIA Interventions since World War II*, 215.

⁵³ Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 178.

⁵⁴ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 116.

⁵⁵ Brands, *Latin America’s Cold War*, 111.

⁵⁶ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 129.

⁵⁷ Brands, *Latin America’s Cold War*, 118.

tion of violence. Even Allende's bodyguard stopped carrying weapons for fears of their weapons being confiscated by the military.⁵⁸

The CIA was quite active in the summer of 1973. According to the Senate report, they adopted a more active stance in Chile. It was not only the increased activity by the CIA, but intelligence reporting on coup plotting reached two peak periods.⁵⁹ During the first, in June 1973, an armored regiment of the army attempted to rise up in order to remove Allende from office. It was an isolated attempt, which however, was extinguished by the left-wing militants without too much difficulty. Another factor in its failure was General Carlos Prats, the Commander-in-Chief. Prats' loyalists were never a part of the coup attempt.⁶⁰ At this point, instability within the country was severe. In August 1973 alone, 316 separate right-wing paramilitary attacks took place. This is not the only reason that the summer of 1973 was a transformative time. Carlos Prats was also forced to resign due to quarrels with local opposition. After Prats leaves office, Augusto Pinochet assumed the title of Commander-in-Chief. Immediately after Pinochet assumed office, he was bombarded with requests of military intervention, from within the military itself. Admiral Merino, in charge of the Chilean Navy, received a letter signed by 85 officers, pleading for him to 'eradicate Marxism'.⁶¹

The political situation was complicated. In the summer, the Christian Democrats passed a resolution declaring the regime unconstitutional, and in response, at the beginning of September, one million Chileans marched to La Moneda, the presidential palace, in support of Allende.⁶² The Cubans in Santiago were by this point completely convinced of an incoming coup d'état. Allende was not very responsible when it came to his own safety and security. Ignoring requests to move him to the outskirts of the city, where it was deemed to be more defensible, Allende vowed never to give up La Moneda without a fight.

As talk of a possible coup circulated and the second peak period was reached in intelligence reporting about coup plotting, the army under Pinochet's control set their D-Day as 11 September 1973. They would move at 0600.⁶³ Around the same time, Jack Devine, a CIA officer in Santiago at the time, reported to Kissinger that the U.S. Gov-

⁵⁸ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 236.

⁵⁹ United States Senate, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 39.

⁶⁰ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 225.

⁶¹ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 230.

⁶² Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 129.

⁶³ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 130.

ernment was within minutes or hours of receiving a request for aid from a key officer in the Chilean military, planning to overthrow Allende.⁶⁴

Although Devine himself would, years later, ‘say with conviction that the CIA did not plot with the Chilean military to overthrow Allende’⁶⁵, the Senate report read, “The CIA’s information gathering efforts with regard to the Chilean military included activity which went beyond the mere collection of information. (...) They put the United States Government in contact with those Chileans who sought a military alternative to the Allende presidency.”⁶⁶ And this alternative, namely the Pinochet Coup, started, as planned, at 0600, on 11 September.

At around 0930, the siege of La Moneda began. The army gave Allende until 1100 to surrender. At that time, Allende himself had a metal helmet on, and worked among the resistance, distributing weapons and ammunition.⁶⁷ As Allende’s militants and the besiegers exchanged fire, at around 1000, tanks arrived at the palace and opened fire. Allende’s militants had bazookas and snipers around La Moneda, and responded, but the palace was notoriously difficult to defend. They were not only surrounded by the army, the paramilitary Patria y Libertad were also among the besiegers. The fire-fight lasted for some hours.

Allende, as clashes went on, broadcasted a final message to his people. “*This is the last time I shall speak to you. (...) I shall not surrender. Radio Magallanes [pro-UP station] will be silenced very soon too, and my words will no longer reach you. Yet you will continue to hear them; I shall always be with you. At the very least I shall leave behind the memory of an honorable man, who kept faith with the working class. Long live Chile! Long live the people! Long live the workers!*”⁶⁸

The resistance at La Moneda faded and was crushed at around 1400. Pinochet’s soldiers stormed the presidential palace and found Allende dead. He had committed suicide by a rifle gifted to him by Fidel Castro.⁶⁹ Allende was not the only one to die on that day. His Chile also died, transforming into Pinochet’s Chile, where in the first months only, around 1500 Chileans would die, and for the next two decades, terror would reign.

⁶⁴ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, 442.

⁶⁵ Jack Devine, “What Really Happened in Chile: The CIA, the Coup Against Allende, and the Rise of Pinochet”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (July/August 2014), 27.

⁶⁶ United States Senate, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 39.

⁶⁷ Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 242.

⁶⁸ Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile*, 131.

⁶⁹ Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 243.

4. Conclusion

Was the CIA responsible for the Pinochet coup? What was the extent of U.S. intervention in Chile?

Starting with the second question, the full scope of the U.S. intervention constitutes a covert war to undermine and overthrow the Allende government, starting with his second attempt at presidency, continuing to the end of his days as President of Chile. This covert war, with elements of armed assault, bribery, provocation, propaganda, political and economical destabilization, economic blockade, fomenting unrest, funding paramilitary groups, conspiring with local and foreign big business actors, etc. was thorough, comprehensive, and destructive.

Allende's was the first democratic Marxist administration in the region. He posed a danger to the economic interests of American capital, as well as a psychological threat that could potentially further the cause of socialism in Latin America. But Chile posed little strategic threat to the U.S., and his election victory was not a national security crisis by any metric. The priorities of the Nixon administration were not strategic, nor military. They were ideological and financial. Concerns for democracy were not a genuine factor, as evident in the close relations between the U.S. and the Pinochet administration. Nixon's personal ties to the American corporations operating in Chile were also a determining factor in the shaping of his stance towards Allende. Thus, the first democratic Marxist attempt in Latin America was foiled due to personal, ideological and financial imperatives.

Circling back to the first question, was the CIA responsible for the coup? The evidence is inconclusive, but there is more proof in favor of a positive response than against. Documentary evidence demonstrates that the CIA was aware of the coup before it happened. The Senate report itself implies that the CIA's actions went beyond information gathering during the preparations for the coup. Jack Devine, a CIA agent on the ground on that day, denies direct involvement, and states that they were made aware by a contact of theirs. Therefore, it is known that the CIA actively worked to foment a coup in Chile from 1970 to 1973, it is known that they were aware of the coup-plotting before the coup happened, but it is not definitively known whether they orchestrated the coup itself.

A logical conclusion might be that the question is, at least partially, wrong. The CIA was only one part of the covert war against Chile, waged by the U.S. by the means stated above. The Pinochet coup is the final syllable of a sentence, of which every

previous syllable was uttered by the U.S. Government. After the comprehensive covert war against Chile, and directly or indirectly causing the majority of factors to come into realization that would later cause Pinochet's coup itself, it is but a technicality to determine whether or not the U.S. Government orchestrated the Pinochet coup. It is clear that the conditions for the coup were created through the U.S. Government's covert war. Therefore, it can be said that the coup was the result of U.S. intervention in Chile from 1958 to 1973, thus the U.S. can be considered responsible for the Pinochet coup.

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