National
Foreign
Assessment
Center

Secret
NOFORN-NOCONTRACT

[redacted]

136 Copies

Area Briefs

[redacted]

JUL 25, 1978

Secret

OUTGOING MESSAGE

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LATIN AMERICA BRIEF [redacted] FOR JULY 25, 1978. [redacted]

1. CHILE: [redacted] THE CHILEAN PRESS IS SPECULATING THAT MANUEL CONTRERAS, THE FORMER HEAD OF THE CHILEAN NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE, WILL BE AMONG THOSE INDICTED NEXT WEEK IN THE ASSASSINATION OF ONE-TIME AMBASSADOR TO THE US ORLANDO LETELIER. BECAUSE IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT CONTRERAS WOULD NOT HAVE ACTED WITHOUT PRESIDENT PINOCHET'S CONSENT, THE PRESIDENT EXPECTS A ROUGH TIME AHEAD AND HAS BEEN WORKING TO CONSOLIDATE HIS POLITICAL POSITION. AIR FORCE GENERAL LEIGH'S OUSTER YESTERDAY FROM THE RULING JUNTA WAS A MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION. [redacted] 1.5C

[redacted] LEIGH'S OUSTER WAS THE CULMINATION OF HIS LONGSTANDING FEUD WITH PINOCHET OVER THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY. IN THIS INSTANCE, LEIGH'S PERSONAL CRITICISM OF PINOCHET DURING AN INTERVIEW WITH A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT WAS TOO MUCH FOR THE PRESIDENT, WHO WAS SUPPORTED BY THE OTHER JUNTA MEMBERS AND THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. LEIGH'S REMOVAL ELIMINATES PINOCHET'S MOST CRITICAL COLLEAGUE AND STRENGTHENS THE PRESIDENT'S CONTROL OVER THE JUNTA. [redacted]

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[redacted] PINOCHET APPARENTLY BELIEVES HIS POSITION IS SHAKY. IN RECENT WEEKS, HE HAS BEEN CAMPAIGNING THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY FOR A CONTINUATION OF HIS GOVERNMENT. HE HAS BEEN ARGUING THAT 1.5C MANY OF CHILE'S DOMESTIC PROBLEMS WOULD BECOME UNMANAGEABLE IF HE WERE REMOVED. PINOCHET ALSO HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN PLAYING UPON FEARS THAT CHILE IS BEING ENCIRCLED BY UNFRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS AND THAT IT IS OFTEN THE VICTIM OF FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN ITS DOMESTIC AFFAIRS.[redacted]

[redacted] ONE RESULT OF HIS CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN THE FORMATION OF A PERSONALIST POLITICAL VEHICLE SUPPORTING THE PRESIDENT. THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND OTHER OPPOSITION POLITICIANS HAVE BEEN CRITICAL OF THIS, BUT THEY ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO HINDER IT IF PINOCHET JUDGES THAT THE PUBLIC IS IN FAVOR. THE PRESIDENT HAS SUBSTANTIAL POPULAR APPEAL, BUT PERSONAL MOVEMENTS HAVE HAD LESS SUCCESS IN CHILE THAN IN OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES[redacted]

[redacted] DESPITE PINOCHET'S EFFORTS, SOME MILITARY OFFICERS ARE REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN CONDUCTING LOW-KEY DISCUSSIONS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF REPLACING HIM. FOR THE FEW WHO HAVE CONSIDERED THE

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PRESIDENT A LIABILITY FOR SOME TIME, THE PROSPECT THAT CONTRERAS MAY BE INDICTED ARGUES FOR A CLEAN SWEEP OF THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP. [redacted] 1.5C

[redacted] FOR THE MAJORITY WHO STILL SUPPORT PINOCHET, HOWEVER THE ONLY WAY TO PRESERVE THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE MILITARY REGIME IS TO KEEP HIM IN POWER. ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE LITTLE ELSE IN COMMON, BOTH GROUPS BELIEVE THAT CONTRERAS AND PINOCHET WILL BE CONDEMNED ANEW BY THE WORLD MEDIA AND THAT CHILE'S INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION WILL BE EVEN MORE TARNISHED [redacted]

[redacted] WHATEVER HAPPENS DURING THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS, IT IS CLEAR THAT PINOCHET IS PREPARED TO FIGHT ANY MOVE TO OUST HIM. HIS INCLINATION IS TO TOUGH IT OUT, RELYING ON HIS MILITARY AND POPULAR SUPPORT AS WELL AS ON HIS BELIEF THAT HE HIMSELF CANNOT BE INDICTED IN THE LETELIER MURDER. WHETHER HE WILL BE ABLE TO RIDE OUT THE STORM IS AN OPEN QUESTION. [redacted]

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